

John 13:34-35

A New Command

Good morning, everyone. Happy new year! 2026. It is the time for new year's resolutions isn't it. Let me get a quick show of hands for people that have already made a new years resolution. Lots of us. I won't ask you what they are, but I'll tell you mine... my resolution is to read a book before bed every night, instead of playing games on my phone. Sarah will laugh or sigh, I've set this resolution before and it's never quite happened for me.

This happens every year, doesn't it? Fresh optimism, the winds of change, new beginnings; change is in the air. Each of us wants something to be different this year, to the year just past.

But normally our resolutions are **small** adjustments, aren't they. Read more books. Do more exercise. Eat less McDonalds. Sometimes they're more significant things, godly Christian goals. To pray more regularly. To read my bible every day.

Even these good resolutions, they're all about changing one part of my life, one part of my daily routine.

Well I want to suggest something more radical than a new years resolution to you this morning. Something that will affect your whole life, not just one part of it. Something more extreme, more effective, something unique. It's actually not me suggesting it, these are not my words but the words of the Lord Jesus. He makes it much stronger than a suggestion, it is a command. Verse 34, look with me at the beginning of our verses, "a new command, I give to you". Jesus has something better for us this morning than a new years resolution.

We are dropping into the beginning of what is known as the 'upper room discourse' in John's account. As we read along it's as if we're a fly on the wall watching everything unfold; We are in the room with Jesus and his disciples, the night that he is betrayed, his last night on this earth. He is about to be handed over to the Romans to be mocked, humiliated, and crucified. John chapters 13-17 are some of Jesus' last words to his closest friends, and we get to sit in and listen.

Last words are always important, they matter don't they. When we know a close friend or loved one is close to death, their words become even more precious to us. We hang on their every word. Well that's where we find ourselves this morning in John's gospel; this is Jesus's last chance to tell his disciples what they need to know. And what Jesus chooses to say might surprise us. Verse 34 "love one another." The disciples have been listening to Jesus for three years, maybe they were hoping for something more...profound? More complex? It sounds simple, doesn't it, maybe even superficial – love one another. Don't we already know that, Jesus? They might ask "What's 'new' about loving one another?". Love thy neighbour is not a new idea for the Jewish people, it's there in Leviticus 19. What's new

about loving one another? Well we're going to unpack this command of Jesus together, and I think we'll see there is nothing simple or superficial about these final words; there's more depth here than you might think.

We're going to think about two main ideas together; what Jesus means by that word 'love', and then what it achieves. The what and the why. Our headings follow those two ideas. So scrap your new years resolution, throw it in the bin already, January 4th, this is better. This is more important.

Our first point; Jesus love. Please look with me at Verse 34 again "A new command I give you; Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another."

Jesus commands his disciples to love each other. This is not an invitation or suggestion from the Lord Jesus, it is a command. You **MUST** love one another. The language is strong. And it's a **NEW** command. We've mentioned already, haven't we, love thy neighbour isn't new for the disciples. Jesus isn't teaching us a new idea, but a new extreme. "As I have loved you" he says.

The context of these words is so important to us understanding what Jesus means here. Look with me at the very start of the chapter, chapter 13 verse 1, "It was just before the Passover Festival. Jesus knew that the hour had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end."

Jesus knows he is about to be betrayed, to be mocked and beaten and nailed to a cross; just imagine what must be running through his mind. Well actually we don't have to imagine, it says it right there in verse 1, Jesus loved them to the end. He isn't thinking about himself; no he's thinking about his disciples. His friends. And the proof is in what he does next.

As we read on Jesus proceeds to wrap a towel around his waste, get down on his knees, and he washes his disciples' dirty feet.

This is a familiar story for lots of us, but what Jesus is doing here is shocking. Simon Peter can't believe it, he says no way Jesus, that's completely backwards. The master doesn't wash the servants feet. This would be like King Charles cleaning the toilets of Buckingham palace, or the CEO of the hospital emptying the bed pans. You just never see that happen, do you. It would shock us.

But Jesus says that's exactly how his kingdom works; this is what his love looks like. God's kingdom is the upside down kingdom, Jesus the Messiah, the king, the creator himself, down in the dirt washing manure from his followers feet.

Jesus makes the dirty, clean. He loved them to the end.

If washing their feet isn't shocking enough, well we know what will happen to Jesus in the morning. Washing their feet is only the beginning. He is hours away from doing the most

costly, the most shocking act of love in history; he's heading to the cross. The perfect son of God, who never did anything wrong, the only man who doesn't deserve to die, dying in the place of guilty sinners. He loved them to the end. This is love.

One writer speaking of these verses says this "dirty feet are washed clean, and sinless feet are nailed to a cross".

If you read on to John 17, Jesus makes it really clear that this love is not limited to these 11 men in the room with him. He says in John 17:20 "My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message"

Jesus extends his love to each one of us at the cross.

He may not have washed my feet, but he has washed my soul. His death on the cross has paid for every single thing I'll ever do wrong. Spiritually I'm washed clean.

Jesus loves each and every one of his disciples that much. That love is available to you this morning. And here's the point; Once we have received this love from King Jesus, it transforms how we treat one another. As I have loved you, love **one another**.

This is our first implication this morning, the love of Jesus changes us to love disciples of Jesus. Now this isn't a vague, general rule to be nice to other people. He is being specific here, we'll see more of this in our second point, but he is teaching how disciples of Jesus are to treat one another. This command is **to** Christians, **for** Christians.

Now we don't get this right all the time, do we. If you've been a follower of Jesus for any length of time I'm sure you've been hurt by other Christians. In fact I'm sure this will have happened within our church family here at Emmanuel. We do not get this command right all the time, do we. And that's because his perfect love is changing imperfect people.

Picture the cross itself for a moment. I've stolen this from a book by Sam Allberry but it's such a helpful picture. Think of the two wooden beams of the cross. One vertical beam going up, and another beam going across. Well Jesus' death achieves two things. He first restores our relationship with God; we're reconciled to him, that's the vertical. But there's the second beam. The cross also reconciles us to one another. Horizontal. The love of Jesus completely changes how we relate to one another within the church.

Sarah and I have been part of this church for 3 ½ years now, and we really can be encouraged that we have a generous and welcoming community here. Praise God. Last year we had the year of hospitality, didn't we! Members of the church opening their homes, sharing food and time with one another. Praise God for it. There's so much to be encouraged by that's already happening here at Emmanuel, we do see followers of Jesus loving one another.

But I have been challenged by these words of Jesus in my prep for this morning. The love of Jesus is sacrificial, costly, it hurts. And the challenge for us this morning is this; are we loving other followers of Jesus with **that** kind of love? Is it costly? Does it hurt? I don't mean costly in terms of finances, though many of us will be serving church with our money. And I don't mean does it hurt physically. I mean does our love for other Christians cost us anything. Our time, convenience, emotions. Jesus' love is more than being nice to one another.

Just imagine, this year, 2026, instead of new years resolutions, if each one of us resolved to love each other like this. What would our church look like? Here are some examples...

It might look like losing one of your evenings to clean the toilets in our church building. It might mean babysitting for that family that struggle to make it to homegroup because of childcare. It might mean praying at the side of a hospital bed in the middle of the night, because someone in your church family is sick.

Jesus' love will flesh itself out in hundreds of different ways for each of us, but the pattern should always be the same; cross-shaped love. Jesus love.

That's the pattern, we've seen what Jesus commands us to do. Now we're going to think about why. Why is this the lesson Jesus chooses to teach the night before he dies? We're moving to our second heading;

The world will notice. The world will notice. Verse 35 "By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."

Human beings are good at spotting patterns. I don't just mean problem solving like jigsaws or sudokus; Sarah actually went through an intense 'sudoku' puzzle phase last year, she would regularly get frustrated and throw the puzzle down in anger. But she's incredibly good at recognising music, if you play her a few seconds of a song, she'll tell you the name of the song and the artist almost instantly. Every day, we are all recognising patterns, often without realising it.

This morning we've seen the pattern of Christ's love; the pattern of the cross, loving his disciples.

Jesus says that once we've been changed by his love, when we love one another with the same love he's given us, the world will notice. People will spot the new pattern.

Because we don't see this pattern of love out in the world. Our culture is increasingly about the individual; self-love, putting my needs above everything else. We have never been more connected by technology, and yet we are increasingly isolated and lonely. You will find love motivated by all kinds of things; convenience, money, power, selfish gain. But you won't find the pure, selfless love of Jesus. You won't see King Charles cleaning toilets. You won't see the CEO emptying the dirty bed pan.

No the love of Jesus goes completely against the grain, it stands out. By this **everyone** will know that you are my disciples. Jesus says you should be able to spot a Christian a mile away. How do you know? Jesus would say Look at how they treat one another.

Just like Sarah will recognise the person who made the music when she hears the song, people outside of the church will recognise King Jesus when we obey this command to love one another. They hear the music and they remember the artist.

Again this is good and bad news for us this morning, isn't it. If I'm not loving my church family like Jesus does, then I shouldn't expect people outside of church to spot the pattern. If my love for disciples of Jesus doesn't cost me anything, how will they see what the cross cost him? People are good at spotting patterns, but they need to see it.

My friend Claudia shared a positive example of this happening at a church in London recently. A family in their church had just had a baby, and Claudia organised a rota for the church to cook some meals to support this family with their newborn. More than 30 people signed up and provided their meals for those first few months. That might sound like a small act to some of us. But Claudia's boss, who isn't a Christian, heard about it, and she could not believe it. She was so struck by the story she brought it up again months later. She didn't understand why people would do it. She shared that her experience during her own pregnancy was one of isolation, feeling alone, she'd never received that kind of love.

Everyone will know that you are my disciples. People spot patterns. And the pattern of the cross is so different to the world, you can't miss it.

Our core values here at Emmanuel are there at the back of church every week; Gospel-hearted, others-focused, outward looking.

Our hearts are changed by the Gospel; we receive the love of Jesus at the cross. We become others-focused, we begin to love one another like Jesus does. And people outside the church will notice; the world will notice.

What better place to start 2026 than with these words of Jesus. ³⁴ "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. ³⁵ By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."

Can I lead us in a prayer that we would listen to him.