

June 6/7, 2020

**A New Commandment**  
*These Things are Written that You May Believe Series*  
**John 13:21-38**  
Pastor Bryan Clark

For the last three months, as you know, practically speaking, churches have been shut down. On May 22, the president declared churches to be essential, and they need to open again. So I think some people laughed at that. I think a lot of people criticized that; a lot of people rolled their eyes at that. And honestly, I think there are a lot of churches that aren't convinced what they do is essential. But that is the question we want to wrestle with. Is what we do essential? Does it matter? And I would say to you, based on what I've seen over the last week in our streets and across the country, it's hard for me to imagine an organization in a community that is more essential than the Church of Jesus Christ. That's what we want to talk about today.

So, if you have a Bible, turn with us to the Gospel of John, Chapter 13. This is Jesus with His disciples in the upper room. It's now less than twenty-four hours before the crucifixion. Last week we talked about Jesus washing the disciples' feet. And already in chapter 13, already in the upper room, Jesus has told us twice, and John has told us once, about the upcoming betrayal of Judas. So that's where we pick it up in verse 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.”** (\*NASB, John 13:21)

So this is the third time that Jesus has brought it up in chapter 13. John brought it up once, so this is clearly a major theme. The timing of this would be Thursday evening, the beginning of the Passover Feast. Now again, Jewish people factored their days differently, so at six o'clock in the evening, Thursday would have ended, and Friday began. So tactically Passover begins at 6:01 on Thursday evening and runs until 6:00 Friday evening. So this is the beginning of Passover, and this would be the Passover Feast.

Now when you read the Synoptic Gospels—Matthew, Mark and Luke—they talk quite a bit about the Passover meal—Jesus taking the elements of Passover and redefining them as elements of the New Covenant—what we think of as Communion, or the Lord's Supper. John really doesn't talk about that at all, perhaps just knowing that the other writers discussed it. But he actually gives a tremendous amount of material that isn't recorded in Matthew, Mark and Luke, and of course he's writing as an eyewitness.

Jesus is **troubled** as He identifies that one of them will betray Him. We've seen that word before; it means *to be agitated or stirred up*. So, the word was used to describe the pool of Bethesda that would be stirred up; it was used to describe Jesus at the tomb of Lazarus. Jesus used it of Himself as He began to contemplate the suffering on the cross that was to come. And now John describes Him as emotionally churned up as He identifies that one of the twelve men sitting in the room will betray Him. Now Jesus has brought this up before, but it was kind of a vague reference, and I'm not quite sure how the others processed it. But this is not vague anymore; this is really clear. There are twelve men in the room, and one of them is the betrayer. If you go to the Synoptics, this is the moment when

they start to ask, “Is it me, Lord; is it me?” They're really now trying to figure out, “Which one of us is going to do this?” and I'm convinced they don't even know quite what that means.

**The disciples *began* looking at one another, at a loss to *know* of which one He was speaking. There was reclining on Jesus' bosom one of His disciples, whom Jesus loved. So Simon Peter gestured to him, and said to him, “Tell *us* who it is of whom He is speaking.” He, leaning back thus on Jesus' bosom, said to Him, “Lord, who is it?” 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*. After the morsel, Satan then entered into him. Therefore Jesus said to him, “What you do, do quickly.” (Vs. 22-27)**

So it's interesting, the twelve don't know it's Judas. “You” know; “we” know, and so we think it should be obvious, but they don't have any idea. Jesus tells them it's going to be one of the twelve, and they don't know what to make of that. It's interesting that Peter, who in the foot-washing, kind of made a mess of things and got rebuked—and I'm guessing he's a little gun shy—wants to know who it is but doesn't want to get in trouble again. So he gestures to John in some way meaning, “Ask Him who it is.” But this also gives us a little bit of a sense of the setup. In the upper room there would have been most likely a Roman table. It's very low to the ground and would be “U” shaped. People sat on the outside of three sides, and then the server would come up in the open area, in order to serve people. So it's low enough that they would recline on pillows, typically on their left elbow. So this would put John immediately to Jesus' right, and perhaps Peter is just too far away to ask. So he gestures in some way, and by the way it's described, John kind of rolls over and quietly, privately, says to Jesus, “Who is it?” And Jesus identifies who it is as the one to whom He gives the morsel.

Now it's really interesting that John identifies himself as **the disciple whom Jesus loved**. He's going to do that several times in the last half of his Gospel, and there's discussion about why that may be. There's really no question that John is referring to himself. Some people think it's because that's how others referred to John—as *the one that Jesus so loved*. But I think more likely it's that John is expressing the love that *he* felt from Jesus. He's not wanting to talk about himself in his own Gospel. The focus is on Jesus, and much like John the Baptist, he's trying to diminish so Jesus can increase. He's simply expressing one that Jesus deeply loved, and he is that one. So he asked Jesus, and Jesus responds.

By the way the story plays out then, it's most likely Judas would be immediately at Jesus's left in order to be close enough to dip the morsel and hand it to him. That's the most likely place for Judas. So the others don't hear John's question. They don't hear Jesus' answer, so they don't know that's what this is. And in that culture, this would be an act of honor or esteem for the host to offer this morsel, which is kind of a piece of bread. It's a flat bread; it's really tough, kind of leathery in its consistency, and it's often used almost like a utensil to get food to your mouth. But to use that and to dip whatever, and to offer it to Judas would be an act of honor or esteem, and the other disciples probably thought that's what this was. But to John, Jesus was identifying Judas as the betrayer. So He gives it to Judas, and Judas takes it.

It's really interesting to think about. Most scholars think this was like the final attempt by Jesus to reach out and to love Judas, and to give Judas an opportunity to repent and to change his mind. So Jesus has washed Judas' feet and has now reached out to Judas in this final offer. But Judas is unwilling to receive that. I think sometimes—and we've talked about this in our John study—people talk about *election, God's sovereignty, freewill*—all those discussions—and I think a lot of people

sound like they have it all figured out. “It's really clear; it's black and white; this is exactly how it works!” But I find it really interesting that here is Jesus—this is God in the flesh—and He's already told us that Judas is going to betray Him. It was prophesied by David. Yet in the moment, He's reaching out to Judas; He's loving him. It feels like He's giving him one more chance to repent, and again, you have the mystery of, “How exactly does all this work?” Was it possible for Judas to feel the love of Jesus and change his mind? That's part of the mystery of God that's so far beyond what we can understand. To put it in language we talked about two weeks ago, Judas' heart is *hard*. Jesus has reached out, and each time he rejects Jesus, his heart gets *harder*. And now it's pretty dramatic. *Satan has entered into Judas*, and this is the beginning of the end for Jesus to be arrested and crucified.

This whole idea of Satan entering into Judas is interesting. Again we're reminded this is a cosmic war that goes all the way back. This is God in the flesh. So there was a time when Jesus, before His incarnation, actually stood toe-to-toe with Satan in the heavenlies and cast him out of heaven. This would have been God who cast him out. This would have been the serpent in the Garden of Eden that came and tempted Adam and Eve and lured them away from God. So this would be the serpent, when God made a promise that one day the serpent would bruise Him on the heel, that He would crush the head of the enemy. So this has been thousands of years in the making, and it's within hours of the fulfillment. And this cosmic war Satan thinks he's about to win. He has no idea he is about to get his head crushed by Jesus. There is this one moment where Jesus is tempted by Satan. And now about three years have passed, and Satan has entered Judas. And now it begins the countdown. So this is a dramatic part of the story. When Jesus says, “**What you do, do quickly,**” it carries the idea of, “*Get on with it,*” so, “as soon as possible!” I don't know what the timetable was, but what Jesus is wanting is for Judas and Satan to leave, to get out of the room. He's got a couple of hours with His faithful followers, and so He tells Judas to go and get on with it. Verse 28:

**Now no one of those reclining at the table knew for what purpose He had said this to him. For some were supposing, because Judas had the money box, that Jesus was saying to him, “Buy the things we need for the feast”; or else, that he should give something to the poor. So after receiving the morsel, he went out immediately; and it was night.** (Vs. 28-30)

Again I think it's worth noting that the other disciples had no idea Judas was the betrayer. So, it is possible to be with Jesus for this length of time and seem like a believer. Nobody else knew that he was not really a believer, and it just reminds us that we can't necessarily always figure these things out. Only God knows. So Judas leaves, and they speculate maybe he's going out to buy preparations, food or whatever, for the Passover. Some people take that line as evidence that all of this is before the Passover. We talked about that a little bit last week, but there's no reason to take it that way. The Passover was twenty-four hours, and there was more food and supplies needed for that. It's followed by the Feast of Unleavened Bread, which is eight more days. So we know that the markets were open on Passover evening so people could get supplies. It would be logical to think Judas, as the treasurer, is going out *to buy what they need*. The other part of it—*the idea of giving to the poor*—to me, helps confirm this is actually Passover evening. This is Thursday night by our terms because it makes no sense otherwise. There was only one time a year when you would go out at night and money was collected for the poor, and that was basically Thursday night, at the beginning of Passover. That was the evening when it was the tradition to, at night, collect money for the poor. So they thought maybe that's what he's doing.

And then verse 30: ...**he went out immediately; and it was night.** Now obviously that's more than just commentary on what time of day it is. From the beginning of John's Gospel, there has been this play between the themes of light and darkness. It's not just nighttime in terms of the time of day, but it's night. This now puts the wheels in motion, and Jesus will soon be arrested and crucified.

Starting then in verse 31, Judas is out. So now it's just Jesus with His core disciples, and He has a few hours to teach them, to train them, to get them ready for what they could never have imagined, as the bottom is about ready to drop out of their world. He's got a lot of work to do. Scholars refer to this as the *Farewell Discourse*, starting at this point. To me, that sounds kind of impersonal. This is actually a real personal, intimate time with His disciples before their world is rocked in a pretty significant way. Verse 31:

**Therefore 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, and will glorify Him immediately.”** (Vs. 31-32)

Now that's kind of confusing. Jesus uses the word **glorified** five times in those two verses. Glorified means *to be praised* or *to be celebrated*. But basically what Jesus just said is that it's time for Jesus to be glorified, referring to the crucifixion, and because this is the fulfillment of the promise, this is the culmination of the plan. Again, this started in the Garden of Eden in Genesis 3:15. This has been talked about; this has been pictured; this has been prophesied; this has been waited for now for thousands of years; and now it's within hours of the greatest moment in human history! What may look like a tragedy to most, is actually the most glorious moment in human history—when Jesus will fulfill the promise and make a way of salvation. It's close now. Jesus will be glorified, and because He completes the assignment, then that glorifies the Father. And so then the Father, in turn, glorifies the Son—and all this is going to happen **immediately**. That's what it just said. So **immediately** is saying, “This is not like something that will happen someday. This is going to happen right now!” So, there is no question this is referring to the cross. Verse 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.’”**

So, **little children** is a term of endearment. As a matter of fact, John so loves this language that he turns around and, when he writes his epistle, he uses this language seven times to talk to the believers. So Jesus called John that; John liked it so much he called the other believers that. So it's just a term of endearment. He loves them, and this is pretty much exactly what He said to the Jews in chapter 8 when he says He's going to leave, and they can't follow; they can't come with Him, which of course raises all kinds of questions. What does He mean by that? We'll talk more about that next week in chapter 14. Verse 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. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.”** (Vs. 34-35)

So, what does Jesus mean by a **new commandment**? This has been a commandment for over a thousand years; this goes back to the Law of Moses. “*Love your neighbor as yourself.*” So matter of fact, when Jesus was asked, “*What's the greatest commandment?*” He said, “*To love the Lord God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength, and the second is like it, to love your neighbor as yourself.*” It's been a commandment for a thousand years, so what's **new** about it? The word **new**

doesn't mean *brand new*. It's actually a term that means new in terms of *fresh*. We would say like *restoration*, or *regeneration*. It's the same term that's used for the new heaven and earth—for this to be *restored*. So He's talking about a commandment that He's basically refreshing in a new and unique way. And what's new and unique is that they will love others as He has loved them. The best way to think about this is for a thousand years there was a command to love your neighbor as yourself. But just because it's a law, doesn't mean people are empowered to keep the law.

The Old Testament Law—the law of Moses—had six hundred thirteen commandments. “Thou shalt not kill,” but people killed. “Thou shalt not commit adultery,” but they committed adultery. “Thou shalt not steal,” but they would steal. Just because there's a law doesn't mean people keep the law. It doesn't stop people from breaking the law. So the whole point of the law was not that it empowered people to live that way. It provided a standard. Here's the expectation, and it also then provided a standard of judgment when you break the law. If somebody murdered someone, then there was a standard by which they would be judged.

What Jesus is saying is, this is *new* in the sense that this is going to radically change. He is ushering in what we refer to as the New Covenant. This would be the fulfillment of the promise. The old covenant laws were basically external laws, pressures to try to conform behavior. But this is the core of our doctrine—to understand that the law could never change the human heart. The law could never make someone righteous; it just exposed their unrighteousness. But what's about to change is: because of the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus, what Jesus was offering was *new birth*, was *regeneration*, was *changed from the inside out*. He's going to tell them they're actually going to have the very presence of Jesus Himself dwelling within them, to empower them to fulfill the law of love in a way that wasn't possible before. We're told that the law would now be written on human hearts, and it would come from the inside out, and not from pressures from the outside. So Jesus was saying, “This is going to be new, because I'm going to make it possible for you to actually love others as I have loved you.” He goes so far as to say this will be so dramatic that it will be the identifying mark of a follower of Jesus. In other words, you can't—through try-harder religion—do this. The only possibility is if you have experienced *new life* in Christ, and this is what will identify a true follower of Jesus.

I want to come back to that in just a second, but I want to finish the text and then come back. So in verse 36, Peter's not terribly interested in a new commandment. He's wanting to know where Jesus is going, and he wants to go with Him.

**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.” Peter said to Him, “Lord, why can I not follow You right now? I will lay down my life for You.” 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.”** (Vs. 36-38)

So I don't fault Peter. Peter loves Jesus, and Peter is trying to figure this out. If Jesus is going somewhere, he wants to go with Him, and he doesn't understand why he can't go with Him. He has no idea what's about to happen, and I think he's completely sincere when he believes he'll die for Jesus. But the problem is, Peter isn't ready for that. What has to happen first is the opposite. It will be Jesus who will die for Peter, but it will make it possible for Peter to be changed from the inside out, to receive the Spirit of Jesus, to be empowered. One day Peter *will die* for Jesus. Probably all but one—all but John in this room—will ultimately die for the cause of Christ, but they have no idea what's about to come. Jesus will have to teach them. He'll have to instruct them. He will help them understand

what's about to happen. And then they have a mission; they have an assignment, and when they finish their assignment, then they can go to where He is. We'll talk about that next week from chapter 14.

I want to go back to verse 34 now and this idea of a **new commandment**.

So, let's come back to our question, "Does the church matter? Is the church essential?" I want to preface my remarks with a couple of things. First of all, I know this is a very sensitive issue, and part of the problem is, if you say one word incorrectly, then you really get attacked. So I'm going to try to be really careful with my words. But I may not say everything perfectly, so if you can just be willing to listen to my heart in this.

Second of all, I understand that we're a church that's way out on the edge of town. It would be easy for people to say we don't really care about what goes on in our city. But the truth is, we are heavily invested into all kinds of ministries in our city. We're very involved in our city. We love our city. For me personally, I was born and raised here. I grew up a couple of blocks from Lincoln High; I went to Lincoln High. A lot of my friends were in the inner city. I'm not unaware of these tensions. I've actually given my adult life to try to serve this city and make it better, so I care deeply about the city.

But it's more than that to me on this particular issue. This is very personal to me. This is family. Some of you know; some of you don't that I actually have a son-in-law who is black. He has a little daughter who is black, and I want them to grow up in a world where they shouldn't have to fear because of the color of their skin. There will never be another day the rest of my life that this isn't personal to me—so I'm not disconnected from this.

But I want us to think through this, through a biblical lens. There are things that perhaps need to be changed in communities and neighborhoods and law enforcement. I don't have any expertise in those things, and I'm not trying to offer any expertise. I'll leave that to somebody else. I think whenever there's a protest, like what we've seen, there are always going to be a handful of people for whom it's just an excuse to be bad. But the majority of people are there because they care. They're hurt; they're frustrated; they're frightened, and they want to see something changed, and we would agree with that. What we saw was horrible! We do want change. The question we're wrestling with is, "What brings about lasting change?" I think each generation kind of goes through this phase where maybe they think they're the first ones to ever be outraged and horrified, and they take it to the streets, and they're going to demand change. But the reality is these cycles have been going on for many, many years. You hit an age where you've seen it over and over again, and you know it's going to quiet down, and then somewhere, it's going to happen again. And so it should raise the question, "Is there a better way? How do we actually bring about change?" We can talk about better laws; we can talk about more sensitivity training; we can talk about trying to manage this in some way. But at the end of the day, that isn't really going to prevent it.

Think of it this way. We have laws against murder, but people murder. We have laws against sexual assault, but people get sexually assaulted. We have laws against robbery, but people get robbed. So you can pass more laws about some sort of racist behavior, but it isn't necessarily going to stop the behavior. It doesn't work that way. There's a deeper issue at play. It's part of the human condition, and at the core, the problem is, dare I say it, a sin problem. Racism is sin. It's a rebellion against God and His plan for the world. Sin doesn't need more laws. Sin needs a Savior. But as a culture, we don't want to hear that. And until we call these things what they are, we're not really going to get to the solution. We learned in the Proverbs that everyone ultimately lives in the culture you create, whether that's at home, whether that's at school or at work or in a community. But what happens is we kick God to the

curb. We don't want Him in our civic life. Then something like this happens, and people don't know what to do, and so they just get angry. They want something changed! But perhaps we need to rethink that. Sin doesn't need management. Sin needs a Savior.

We have belief systems that now define our culture, that are a part of this. One of them is called *relativism*. It's the belief there are no moral absolutes. There's no absolute truth. Everybody's free to decide for themselves what is right and wrong or good or evil. And yet, when something like this happens, immediately people take it to the streets and identify it as evil. Yet in a relativistic culture, you can't do that. You'd have to say, "I wouldn't do that, or I don't like that," but what is the basis by which you call that behavior evil?

In a Christian worldview, we believe there is absolute truth. We believe there is absolute morality. We wouldn't hesitate to say racism is evil, and what happened in Minnesota is evil. It's sinful! The only way we're going to make progress is if we can come together and say, "Can't we agree there are moral standards, and that was wrong; it was evil?" We've raised multiple generations around the idea that there is no Creator God, that we're here on the basis of natural evolution. And there is no meaning, there is no purpose and, at the end of the day, the mechanism that moves everything forward is survival of the fittest. Yet when we see survival of the fittest played out in the street, we're horrified by it! Shouldn't that cause us to stop and reconsider some of what we're teaching with this worldview—that once we live in that culture, we don't like it!

Think how different that is if you believe there's a Creator God, that everything is created by God, that everyone is created on purpose, for a purpose. Not only does God create humankind, He creates human kinds, meaning races, and He creates them wonderful and He creates them beautiful, and He creates them with dignity and with delight. If each race was like a color of paint on the palette, it's the artist painting this masterpiece—and it's beautiful—and He delights in it. It's this beautiful tapestry of color where everyone comes together and flourishes together. It's what the Bible calls *shalom*. That's God's vision for the world. That's what He wanted. But sin does violence to shalom. Racism is a rebellion against God and God's desire for the world. Sin doesn't need management. Sin can't be controlled by laws. Sin needs a Savior. Racism is not new. Racism goes back thousands of years.

In the first century Roman culture, for example, they were highly racist, far more than we would understand as Americans. And yet as a result of the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus, and the birth of His church, miraculously He brought Jews and Gentiles together as one people in God. Paul himself would have been racist as a Jewish Pharisee, and yet as a result of his encounter with Jesus, Paul so loved the Gentiles, he dedicated his entire life as a missionary of the gospel to the Gentiles. He ultimately had his head cut off by Nero because of his commitment to take the gospel to the Gentiles, people whom he previously hated, simply because of their race. For two thousand years, the gospel of Jesus Christ has changed cities and cultures and countries.

The whole idea of a **new commandment** is the idea that you can't change the human heart through laws and through rules and through management systems. Sin needs a Savior. What Jesus offers is not management. It's new birth; it's regeneration; its transformation. It's change from the inside out that ultimately is the change I think we're all longing for. The message of the gospel is not the responsibility of the government. It's not the responsibility of law enforcement. It's not the responsibility of the protesters. It's the responsibility of the church! We have been given the stewardship or the management of the life-changing message of Jesus, to take it to the streets, to lovingly but faithfully explain the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus, and why Jesus did that for you. That's our responsibility as the church. Lincoln Nebraska is not New York City; it is not Chicago. This doesn't

have to be overwhelming. We're a small enough city that if the church united together to faithfully fulfill her mission, we could change this community. We could create at least a glimpse of shalom, or the world as God intended it to be, in such a way that people could flourish regardless of the color of their skin. That's part of our mission as a church. That's why church matters. That's why church is essential in every community. Because ultimately, it's only Jesus that can bring about the flourishing that I believe people genuinely long for. Let's pray.

*Our Father, I pray that we would be faithful as your church to proclaim the message that truly changes people's lives. Lord, we can try to pressure sin; we can try to manage sin, and try to somehow control sin. But ultimately sin needs a Savior. Lord, help us to be diligent stewards of the gospel, that we might do our part in bringing about lasting change in our community. In Jesus' name, Amen.*

Scripture taken from the NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE  
Copyright 1960, 1962, 1963, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1987, 1988,  
The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission.  
Lincoln Berean Church, 6400 S. 70th, Lincoln, NE 68516 (402) 483-6512  
Copyright 2020 – Bryan Clark. All rights reserved.

## **A New Commandment**

### *That You May Believe*

John 13:21-38

Pastor Bryan Clark

### **Opening Discussion**

1. Is the local church essential? Why or why not?
2. Can the church ultimately be what God has called her to be functioning “on-line?” Why or why not?

### **Bible Study**

1. Read John 13:21-30. What are some practical lessons we learn from the story of Judas?
2. Why do you believe Jesus served Judas as he did both in the washing of feet and giving him the morsel as an act of honor or esteem? What do we learn from Jesus from this?
3. Read John 13:31-38. Compare Philippians 2:5-11 with 13:31. Why was the Son of Man glorified by the cross? How does that moment in history fulfill Genesis 3:15?
4. What makes Jesus’ new commandment new? What does this teach us about our life now in the New Covenant? How does it differ from what the Old Covenant offered?
5. What is the difference between living out new life in Christ and a “try harder” religion?
6. What can we learn from Peter’s statement and Jesus’ response to Peter?

