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Series: People on a Mission
Message: Love Others

Transcribed Message
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John 13:35

It was in June of 1967 that somewhere between 400 and 700 million people took part in what would be the largest satellite broadcast of an event in the history of the world. In fact, the event was called "Our World". It was rock bands from 19 different countries around the world that took place in this simulcast that was, as I said, the largest audience in the history of the world. One band and one song kind of carried the day. It was a group you may have heard of from a place called England, the Beatles. Their song was "All You Need is Love". A rather simple and memorable tune. You know it well. All you need is love. Love is all you need. All you need is love, love, love. Love is all you need. They repeated that 111 times. I'm pretty sure that no matter how many times they would repeat the word love, what they had in mind and in general what the world understands and has in mind when they talk about love, is very different than what we're going to be looking at this morning.

We are in what we call our "Fall Focus". When we come to the fall, we historically have stepped out of whatever series we were in and we kind of retool and renew and refocus our attention on some very basic things and talk about basic things. That's what we're trying to do. Last year we talked about the fact that we need to be people of the Spirit. Two years ago we talked about we need to be people of the book. This year we're looking at the fact that we are people on a mission. So we're taking these four weeks and we're looking at the mission and vision. What we hope to understand is to see the heart and the passion of God for our world and for ourselves. Let's start right there and step into that matter of our mission and our vision.

We have said repeatedly that our mission as the people of God at Covenant is that we would understand that we have one basic task. Ultimately in all of these things, we want to bring glory to God. This one mission that we have focused on and centered on is this matter of making disciples. We want to not just make disciples. We want to

make disciples who in turn make other disciples. That certainly is God's heart for us and that's the commission that He has given to us. We serve a seeking God. We serve a sending God. We talked a couple of weeks ago about the fact that every event in our day, every circumstance that God orchestrates we ought to be looking at through this lens of mission. We ought to be looking at through this understanding of this moment has eternal significance. I'm in this conversation, this contact for a reason and that is that we are to be on mission for God. We also talked about the fact that with that mission there comes a vision.

Our vision is to be people who first of all know God. It's very hard to worship a God you don't know. It's hard to love God the way that we are called to love Him if we don't know Him. You can't serve a God in the way that He desires to be served if we don't know Him. That was our point of emphasis last week. We want to be people who know God. To be people who know God, you've got to be people of the book. So we're right back where we were a couple of years ago, right? Habakkuk chapter 2 and verse 14 has this great statement: For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of God as the waters cover the sea. Isn't that great? This is a day that is yet coming. The earth is going to be filled with the knowledge of the glory of God like the waters cover the sea. That's the journey that we're on, to know God in that way.

Secondly, we'll be looking this morning at this matter of loving others. That's our focus this morning. What we're going to see this morning, and I don't know who first said this but it's everywhere now, but only when we love God the most can we love others the best. I want to just add another sentence to that and say the distinguishing mark of a Christian is loving like Jesus has loved us. So that's where we're going to be this morning. Lord willing, next Sunday we'll finish off this little short series with to live the gospel. We want to be people who know God. We want to be people who love others. We want to be people who are living out the gospel every day of our life.

Let's look at this matter of the greatest of these is love. I said last week when we looked at the knowledge of God that one of the most pervasive themes in all of the Bible is this matter of knowing God. What do you think I'm going to say this week? One of the most pervasive themes in all of the Bible is this matter of loving God. Those two really are pervasive themes. We were all over the place last week in discovering how much

the Bible has to say about this matter of our knowing God and growing in our understanding of God and His immensity, His majesty, His greatness, His glory. We can say the same thing with regard to the love of God. That's the point of Paul's prayer. Isn't it significant that in these two areas the Holy Spirit saw fit to have the apostle Paul give to us literal prayers that we can join with and pray ourselves and for ourselves with regard to the knowledge of God. I hope some point in this past week that the Holy Spirit brought that to mind and you prayed for yourself and you prayed for this fellowship and you prayed for your family members to grow in their knowledge of God. You can do the same thing this week. You can say this matter of the love of God is so significant that we have in Scripture a prayer that is calling on us to ask God to do this in our life. Let's do that.

Let's look at this matter of love as a major focus of Scripture. Now seven is the perfect number so I stopped at seven. We could have done 14. We could have done 21 but here's what we're going to do. There are seven statements in your outline. Put your phone app away that has all of the answers to the outline in it because we're going to know right away if you get all of them before anybody else. Let's just make this a little fun exercise. I'll read the sentence and then you fill in the blank. Then we'll give the place in the Bible where this verse is recorded. So here we go. We can pit Covenant north against Covenant south and Covenant mid-south against mid-north. We can just get really after this. God is _____. That was the easiest one. God is love. Where do you suppose that statement is in the Bible? Anybody want to shout out at least a book? 1st John. 1 John 4:8. God is love. If you ever wondered about the pervasive message about the love of God, it starts off by God's declaration that He is love.

This one is equally easy. God loves the what? The world. We find that in the gospel of John in chapter 3 and verse 16. Number three. Who loves at all times? Friends. Friends love at all times. At some point in our Proverbs series down the road, we'll probably run into this verse in Proverbs 17:17. A friend loves at all times. Number four. Love your what? Was there more than one answer in there? It sounded like it. It might've been some breaking out of tongues there and there was another word. Somebody said enemies. What other word was there? Your neighbor. Okay, that would have been good. This one was love your enemies. Matthew 5. Number 5. Love is the

what of the Spirit? Fruit. Love is the fruit of the Spirit. That can be found in Galatians chapter 5 verse 22. You come back to the fruit of the Spirit and the first aspect of this fruit that is mentioned is love. The significance of this truth. How about number six? The two greatest blanks center around love. You guys are so good. The two greatest commandments. So again when Jesus is asked that question: what's the greatest commandment? He doesn't stop at one. Love God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and oh by the way, love your neighbor as yourself. The first and second of the commands. Then finally, if you love Me what will you do? You will keep, will obey My commandments. And that is where? In the Gospel of John right here where we're to be going. One of these commandments that we are told to keep is this matter of love one another.

Let's look at love as the mark of a Christian and let's turn to the gospel of John. and let's turn to the 13th chapter. We see that very statement and we'll get to it, but I'm going to read it right now and we see it in verse 35, "By this all people will know that you are My disciples if you have love for one another." The context is very important in which we look at the statement this morning. You remember this is the last night that Jesus is with His apostles. These 12 men and Jesus are gathered in what we call the Upper Room. Jesus is sharing with them in this last night a very intimate time with them.

Within that context there are three things that we need to highlight to get the depth of this teaching. The first one is that there is a great demonstration of humility. There's a great demonstration of humility. We sang about it but you notice in verse 3 it says "Jesus, knowing that the Father had given Him all things into His hands, and that He had come from God was going back to God, rose from supper. He laid aside His outer garments, and taking a towel, tied it around His waist. Then He poured water into a basin and began to wash the feet of the disciples." Earlier in this same day these same men are walking along and they're arguing about which of them is the greatest. They're having a conversation among themselves about who is the greatest of the 12. They get to this night and they get to see the greatest demonstration of humility that they had ever witnessed. Every one of them knew the protocol that would take place in this kind of setting, that somebody was supposed to wash everybody's feet. Of course, it usually fell to a servant or a slave. The fact that there wasn't one there, none of these

twelve were going to make the effort to get up and wash the feet of the others. The only one who was willing to do that was the Lord Jesus Himself. He goes around this room and He washes the feet of these men. Dusty, smelly feet. The very thing that they wouldn't do for each other Jesus in this incredible demonstration of humility does for them. It reminds us right out of the gate that one of the ways that we truly love each other is we serve each other. One of the ways we truly love each other and demonstrate love for each other is in service to each other. That is true in our family relationships. It is true in our church relationships. It is a demonstration of love.

The second thing that we notice here is there's the dismissal of the betrayer. You see that in verse 31: "When he had gone out, Jesus said, 'Now is the Son of Man glorified and God is glorified in Him.'" The one who is going out is Judas. Look back at verse 30: "So, after receiving the morsel of bread, he immediately went out. And it was night." You have this dismissal of Judas the betrayer. Verse 30 while it is speaking of the physical realities -- it's night. It's late in the evening so it's dark outside and he went out into the night. He literally went out into the night, but it is also a picture of where this man is spiritually. There's a darkness in his soul unlike the darkness of the soul of almost anyone else from what Jesus would later say about him. With the dismissal of Judas, Jesus is now ready to enter into some new family truth with these remaining 11 apostles. There is in these words that Jesus is going to share life in the new covenant community and what this is to look like, what it is that Jesus is laying down by way of a new community rule for how they relate to one another.

The last thing I want you to see in this context is there is the ever present matter of the cross. We've already read verse 31 but just look at it again. "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 glorify him at once. Little children, yet a little while I am with you. You will seek me, and just as I said to the Jews, so now I also say to you, 'Where I am going you cannot come.'" What you have here from the human viewpoint is a couple of verses that we have some trouble processing because Jesus is linking the coming cross with this idea of glory. He doesn't just say that one time. In these two verses, 31 and 32, five different times He talks about the word glory in connection with the cross. We sing in the cross of Christ I glory for the

very reason that Jesus says in verses 31 and 32 that He glories in the cross. How is it that you can glory in this horrific instrument of death? It is because Jesus is acknowledging and pointing us to the fact that all of redemptive history is coming to this climactic moment of the cross.

I mentioned that last Sunday when we were getting ready to take communion all of human history points to the coming of the Messiah, to the coming of Jesus, to the death on the cross and the events that would transpire there. Then all of history looks back to the cross. That's what we do. There was a forward looking to the cross and then there is a backward look. That is because this is the climax of redemptive history. It's also a reminder to us that this is the reversal of what happened in the garden. Jesus is the last Adam. The first Adam and the first Eve failed us and rebelled against God and turned away from Him. The last Adam comes and the last Adam is victorious and successful. So we glory in that. Of course, we also glory in the fact that He is the overcomer of sin and death and Satan. So yes we do glory with Jesus in this amazing cross. This is why we have a mission. We have a mission because there's a cross. We have good news. We have the gospel because there's a cross.

That brings us secondly to the 11th commandment. We have 10 Commandments and someone has suggested that this is the 11th commandment. I think that's probably a good way to look at that. In verses 33 to 35 the very first thing I want you to see is Jesus's heart for His disciples. His heart for His disciples. You see this in verse 33 when Jesus says, "Little children, yet a little while I'm with you. You will seek Me, and just as I said to the Jews so now I say to you, 'Where I am going you cannot come.'" This is a picture of Jesus's heart for His disciples. He has been with these men for some three years now. They've been in all kinds of situations. They've had numerous conversations, spent a lot of time together, very much a sharing of life. What you read in verse 33 of John chapter 13 you read nowhere else in all of Scripture except one place. Jesus saying to these men for the first time and the only time – little children. These are fully grown men. The only time Jesus says this is in this last evening with them and He says to them little children. Honestly, to us that just is almost so foreign we can't even process that. How in the world could a grown man say to other grown men? little children? The reason is because while this word isn't a part of our vocabulary as we

address each other in those kinds of relationships, it was a word of great affection. It was a word of tenderness that Jesus was sharing with these men. They saw His heart that night in a way that He had not expressed before. It is not like this is something that they had heard repeatedly in their three or so years with Him. He had never said it. He had never called them little children before. But in this enduring moment, in this moment of great sympathy and affection, this is what He does.

I would just step back from that and in just in speaking to the guys it encourages me. I hope it encourages you to recognize that as a man and as the spiritual leader of your home, as someone who maybe has influence in the lives of children and teenagers and whatnot. There's really a place for affection and tenderness and a sharing of that with each other. There's not a conflict with being truly a man and at the same time showing great sympathy and tenderness and affection. Jesus did it. He was as much a man as anybody would ever hope to be. Here He is strong and yet incredibly tender. We ought to be able to express that within the context of our relationships. Do you know who this had the most impact on? The beloved disciple who is sitting right next to Jesus in this tender evening of this last time together. It's John the author of this book. The writer of the book of Revelation, the writer for 2 and 3 John. So in all of Scripture, in all of the New Testament, Jesus one time calls these men little children. The only other place in all of the New Testament that this phrase is used is by John in 1 John and then John uses it seven times to express his heart and the tenderness of his heart towards those that he was shepherding spiritually. It really struck John in a powerful way. All of that then to say to us that what Jesus is doing here is He is issuing us a command. We see the heart of our Lord for His disciples.

Now let's look at this matter of this command that Jesus issues in verse 34 and 35. This command cuts right to the heart of where these men are failing each other and failing to do the very thing that God has called them to do and that is to love each other. Let's look at five things about this command that really hopefully will drive this point home. We see the first one in verse 34: "A new commandment I give to you." The first thing we observe and we write down is this is a new command. Now how do we know this is a new command? Jesus told us, right? Jesus told us that this is a new command. Jesus actually says that to us. He says this is a new command. But what if I say to you

that as far back as Leviticus chapter 19, we have a command that says love each other. Love your neighbor. So we have Jesus saying I have a new command for you and we have in the Old Testament under the under the Old Testament law that God's people were commanded to love each other. So which is it? Is it an old command or is it a new command? Well, the answer is both of those. What Jesus is going to do is He's not giving them a new idea, a new concept. He is not introducing them into something that they've never heard before. They were supposed to love each other? Of course they had thought of that. The people of God have always been required to love each other. But what Jesus is going to do is He's going to introduce how it is that we're to love in a new way, the way that we are to love. We'll see that as we go along.

Secondly, I want you to notice the fact that it's a command. That tells us that this is not optional. It's not optional. This is the present imperative. We know a present imperative. This is a present tense command. You're to do this. You're to be doing this all of the time. This is not a test. This is not a technique. This is not a suggestion. This is not some self-help comment. This is a command from our Lord. So whenever we have imperatives in Scripture, we can simply say this is God's will for your life. We can take this command that Jesus says and I can say to you and to myself this is God's will for us – that we love each other.

If you want to know at any given time if you're filled with the Spirit since we've already noted that to be filled with the Spirit is to love, if you want to know if you're filled with the Spirit, you can simply look at your life and you ask am I loving as I'm supposed to? If you're loving in that way, then it's a pretty good indication that you're filled with the Spirit. If you're not loving that way, that is a pretty good indication that you're not filled with the Spirit. The Bible calls that something. What does the Bible call that? It's called sin. If we're not loving, if we're not obeying this command, we're not doing the will of God for our life.

So here is this group of men and they've already demonstrated that their greatest desire is with regard to themselves, that they are looking out for their own interests. Nobody is going to run and get the basin and the towel. Nobody is going to volunteer to do the work of a servant and a slave to the guy that he thinks he's better than. They've already had an argument. They've already had a discussion about who is better, who is

greater than the other person. A slave certainly doesn't demonstrate his greatness by going and washing someone else's feet. It wasn't that long ago that the mother of James and John approached Jesus and said Jesus, I have a request. I'd like to ask that my sons James and John sit on either side of You and Your throne. You talk about a mom who had ambition for her children. That would be it. These thoughts are not prevalent in the minds of these men. Yet Jesus is pressing in to them and saying listen, this is My command to you that you love each other. You don't pick and choose who you love. The commands of God don't give us that kind of leeway. This is a command that we love others without exception. We don't pick and choose who gets to be in our group or who doesn't get to be in our group based on whether we love them and whether they're attractive to us in some way or we want them to be a part of our group. Jesus says love each other. This is a command. Period. If this should be happening anywhere, it should be happening at the church. If this idea of loving each other indiscriminately, of loving each other sacrificially, of loving each other faithfully is happening anywhere, it should be happening in here. Without question we should be loving each other. Instead of coming and getting and being a consumer, it should be coming and giving and serving and loving.

Thirdly, it's all about love. Obviously, this is a new command and this command centers around one word and that word is love. We are to love as Christ loved us. This is the word that we see for instance in 1 Corinthians 13. This word, that if you've been in church very long, you probably have heard numerous times. The word for love is *agape*. It's this highest degree of love. It is selfless and sacrificial. It's gracious and kind and forgiving. In this setting, that's happening in this night in this 13th chapter. Jesus simply is looking at these men and saying James, you've got to love Andrew. Andrew, you've got to love Bartholomew. Bartholomew, you've got to love Philip. Philip, you've got to love Thomas. And oh by the way, all of you have got to love Peter and that's not an easy thing to do. All of these different perspectives, all of these different personalities, all of these different ways of looking at life and living life that are brought together in a group like this. Different politics as we know. We've got guys on both end of the spectrum even within these twelve.

The truth is Jesus could have easily said to these men some of you are just not very easy to love. Do I dare say that this morning that some of you are not very easy to love? I would only say that if I include myself in that so I certainly include myself in that and say I'm not very easy to love either. You don't need to go get a testimony from Bonnie on that, but the reality is that's where we are. We're not easy to love a lot of the time. There aren't any fine prints or asterisks to go down at the bottom of the page and say "except in these circumstances". Jesus simply says to these men you're to love each other in the way that I love.

DA Carson nailed it when he said: "Ideally, the church itself is not made up of natural friends. It is made up of natural enemies. What binds us together is not common education, common race, common income levels, politics, nationality, accents, jobs, or anything of the sort. Christians come together not because they form some natural groups, but because they have been saved by Jesus Christ and owe Him a common allegiance. In the light of this common allegiance, in the light of the fact that they have all been loved by Jesus Himself, they commit themselves to doing what He says and He commands them to love one another. In this light, they are a band of natural enemies who love one another for Jesus's sake." So we don't need to find all of these commonalities with each other to love each other. There are in fact a hundred reasons why we may not naturally be drawn to each other, but we're still commanded by our Lord to love one another.

Now fourthly, it is to follow His example. That is the whole point of this. The key words here in the text are "just as I have loved you". Just as. Again, we're in the context of this last night, and the cross looms. We have this great sacrifice that casts a shadow over this whole evening. They have all loved Him. Jesus turns this around and says you all have loved Me, now you need to love each other in that same way. I certainly think that's part of the newness of this command. The newness of this command is the way that we are now told to love each other. In the Old Testament under the Old Covenant, they weren't given this directive because the cross hadn't happened. But now we living on this side of the cross are told that we're to love each other in this new way because we're to love each other as Christ has loved us. There is no higher example than to follow the love that is Jesus's love for us. That's why it's a new command. We're in a

new community and we need new power to do that. It is the Holy Spirit and it's the gift of the Spirit and it's the work of the Spirit that enables us to overcome these natural issues and to love supernaturally in the way that God has called us to. One of the ways that we find that out we're filled with God's Spirit is we love one another as Christ has loved us.

Then finally, notice the impact of this. Verse 35. This statement that we started off with. "By this all people will know that you are My disciples if you have love for one another." The mark of a fully devoted follower of Christ. What is the mark of a fully devoted follower of Christ? According to Jesus, it is this command. This command. If you read this the way Jesus has worded it, this command can be violated. This command can be disobeyed. He says if you'll do this, so there's a choice there to be made. Sometimes people make a very hard distinction which I think this text does not support, and that is if you don't love others the way Jesus loves, you're not even a Christian. It becomes some kind of a test of assurance of salvation. The reality is if that's the basis of the assurance of salvation, we're probably all in a lot of trouble, because the truth is we fail oftentimes to love each other the way Jesus has loved us. We expect the world to notice though. If we expect the world to pay attention to what's going on within the body life of a group of Christians, then we have to love each other. Jesus said that's the mark, that's the way that they will know that you love one another. Someone said the mission of the great commission would be much easier if we gave priority to the great commandment. So the great commandment is to love God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength, and love your neighbor, love each other as you love yourself. Jesus in some respects raised the ante and said it's not just as you love yourself but it is even as I have loved you.

Francis Schaeffer, who as you know was a prolific author, wrote two specific books that I think speak to this. One was called *The Church Before the Watching World*. In this book, the thesis had to do with the church's commitment to truth and the transformation that it brings into our life. What happens to the church when it wanders away from truth? It is always a sad outcome. The other book that he wrote that's right on the mark is called *The Mark of the Christian*. He builds that book around this thesis that if we want the world to pay attention to anything that we have to say, the most strategic thing that we can be doing is obeying this command that Jesus specifically

said would be the mark, would be the thing that would distinguish us from the world. Yet sadly, what is the world seeing so often except anything but Christians loving each other? When that's the case, then we have no reason to be critical of the world. If we're not wearing the badge that Jesus said we're to wear to give a testimony to the world about why it is that we're different, then we have no reason to hope they will listen to the message that we have. So only when we love God the most can we love others best. The distinguishing mark of the Christian is loving like Jesus loves.

What do we take away? I actually had a number of things in mind as to how to wrap up this morning. I thought we would probably do well to just spend time in confession and repentance and just say Father, we have failed so often individually, corporately, the church, both local here and around the world. We have failed so often to obey this command to love each other the way that You have told us to. It would do us well to simply take a moment and confess that and acknowledge that and repent of that failing. Then maybe even to ask the Father who is it that You would bring to mind that I am not loving in this way. The Holy Spirit is very faithful to answer those kinds of requests. If we were to just simply take a moment and say Spirit of God, bring to my mind people in my life that I am failing to love the way Jesus has commanded me to love. You might give consideration to who would be on that list.

But here's the way I decided to end this morning. The badge of discipleship that matters most to Jesus. We can claim all kinds of things. We can claim to be a church that does this or that. We can highlight this or that about our church. We can market our church in a hundred different ways. That's kind of the thing today. Marketing the church and all of the different things that churches want to be known for. How about we be known for the very thing that Jesus says we're to be known for? Jesus told us how to market the church. Jesus told us what the mark of the church is to be. The mark of the church is to be that we love purposely, intentionally, sacrificially everybody in here and everybody out there that we come in contact with. That's the mark of the church that Jesus is interested in. For all of the ways that Covenant Community Church might be known, I can't think of a better way to be known than being a group of people who are going to love each other well.

Let's pray. Father God, it is this great love that You have shown to us that we want to demonstrate to each other and to a lost and dying world. Father, we know that all begins with the gospel of Your grace, Your mercy, Your kindness to us. Father, not because we deserve it because we don't, but it is simply by Your grace that we are saved through faith and that not of ourselves. It's the gift of God. Father, we would ask that Your Spirit might bring understanding to anyone here this morning who has not experienced that love in a personal way, that has not understood that You, more than any of us could ever imagine, want to have a personal relationship with us. So we pray, Father, to that end. We thank You for this great gift that You have given to us in the person of Your Son. In His name we pray, amen.