

Sermon Series: “Good News for Life”
“A Key Test of Discipleship”
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For all things important for a person’s role, there must be a test! After all, how do we know if the person is qualified? Have you ever been through a test to see if you qualified for something? We have all kinds of tests for things today. To get a driver’s license, a person must pass the driver’s test. To be an attorney in Louisiana, a person must pass the Louisiana bar test. But there are also some rather informal tests. E.g., I recall reading about the rock band The Police back in the 1970’s or 1980’s who were supposed to work with someone to produce their next album, but they were unsure if the person was qualified to do so; so the guitarist Andy Summers played a well-known riff from Led Zeppelin, and the would-be producer did not recognize it. Thus, he failed the test to be their producer! We may have some tests in dating relationships. E.g., I know of a young woman who wants to see if a young man will open the car door for her. E.g., I recall a little test I did when I drove a 1974 Chevrolet Nova— two-door, with 350 engine, with horrible gas mileage. There were no power door locks— it was all manual. So when I would open the door for my date to let her in the passenger side, I would use the key, unlock the door, and let her in, and walk to the driver’s side— and I would watch to see if she would lean over to the driver’s side to unlock the door, or have me use my key to unlock my door. I recall at least once where my date failed the test! For all things important for a person’s role, there must be a test. And the same is with being a disciple of Jesus.

READ John 13:31-35 (p. 108)

CONTEXT: Jesus is with the disciples at the last supper. He has just washed the feet of the disciples and then shared with them that one of them is going to betray Him— Judas. And then Judas leaves the table to perform his horrific act of betrayal.

READ vv 31-32. “Jesus saw His death, ironically, as not only a time when He is glorified, but God as well. How can this be? Cf. 12:23-26,27-28.” This can be so because Jesus’ glorification not only indicates His death, but also implies His resurrection. Without the resurrection, Jesus’ death is the same as everyone else’s, nothing really special. We can see the anticipation of Jesus’ resurrection in the Gospel of John at 7:39— “Now he [Jesus] said this about the Spirit, which believers in him were to receive; for as yet there was no Spirit, because Jesus was not yet glorified”. E.g., NFL Network sometimes offers a documentary-style feature which follows a particular team— like the New England Patriots— through pre-season and their season with players and coaches miced up, and I have thought such shows were interesting, but if the team does not win the Super Bowl, then the I have always found this show of very limited interest. Why? Because the team featured is like every other team that struggles through a season and does not reach any extraordinary goal. Jesus’ death is kind of like this— Jesus’ death is special of course because He died for our sins, but what makes this whole event glorious is the resurrection— Jesus’ death was not the end of His life! In this respect Jesus is glorified in our passage, and God is too.

READ v 33. “Jesus comforted His disciples not as co - laborers in the Kingdom ministry, but as little children— i.e., with a term of endearment. What does this tell us about His relationship with them? Cf. 1:12-13; 1 John 3:18; 4:4. Please see also the Parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32).” Jesus tells His disciples, as He told the Jewish leaders in 7:33-34, that where He is going they cannot come. And He calls them a term which is found eight times in the New Testament— once in John, and seven in 1 John— τεκνίον, which is the

deminutive form of τέκνον. READ 1 John 3:18; 4:4. This reminds us of the early words in the Gospel of John where we are told that all that receive Him, who believe in His name, the He has given them the authority to be children of God (1:12-13). Have you ever seen someone called a term of endearment? E.g., we recall that President John Kennedy had a son who was known affectionately in his early years as ,”John John”. E.g., I have noticed my Mother-in-law calls her children “Mi amore”. You may have been called a term of endearment when you were growing up. E.g, I recall I was called by my family, and admit I am sometimes still called, “Nory”. Such terms of endearment make one’s defenses come down, it allows us to listen to what is being said because it is obvious that the person who is talking to us loves us and really cares about us. And this is what Jesus felt for His disciples, and they could listen to this hard saying He was giving them about not being able to follow Him to where He was going. And I suspect that when those of us who follow Jesus as Lord and Savior get to the Kingdom in-person, He will call us by name and preface it with τέκνιον, or μου τέκνιον (my little child).

READ vv 34-35. “Before He leaves them, He gives them a new commandment which is a key to defining discipleship. In what sense is it *new*? Cf. 1 John 2:7-11; Matthew 6:14-15; 18:21-22. Please see the Parable of the Unforgiving Servant (Matthew 18:23-25).” So, how is it new? We are aware that Jesus taught that the two greatest commandments are to love God first with all our hearts and souls and minds, and to love our neighbors as ourselves (Matthew 22:34-40). But this commandment in v 34 is new in that it is focused and rooted in Jesus. It is a love focused on His disciples, but also extends to the world. As Paul said in Galatians 6:10, “So then, whenever we have an opportunity, let us work for the good of all, and especially for those of the family of faith”. How did Jesus love His disciples? He gave His life for them. READ 15:12-13. What does this look like after Jesus’ time? E.g., the church father Tertulian (145-220 AD)

wrote in *Apology* 39 how the Christians of his day were seen by unbelievers: “But it is mainly the deeds of a love so noble that lead many to put a brand on us. *See, they say, how they love one another*, for themselves are animated by mutual hatred; how they are ready even to die for one another. . .” I love also the way that Oswald Chambers put it in the early 1900s: “Jesus Christ out-socialists the socialists. He says that in His Kingdom he that is greatest shall be the servant of all. The real test of the saint is not preaching the gospel, but washing disciples’ feet, that is, doing the things that do not count in the actual estimate of men but count everything in the estimate of God” (*My Utmost for His Highest*, p. 40). Oswald Chambers was exactly right. Have you ever seen Christians love each other not just in the big ways, but the small ways too— making sure they feel included in a conversation, inviting them to get together, encouraging them in what they see in a person’s walk with the Lord. It is wonderful when you see a church that is like that, and I want you to know I see that in you. E.g., the Valentine’s Gift Bags— that came from you! Mary Ellen had the idea, I set out the cards, and you signed them and wrote in them, made sweets, brought sweets, made heart magnets, organized the bags, helped deliver the bags, etc. Then Randy went with me, and Jenny let him, on this their first Valentine’s Day of their marriage. That evening I got a call from someone with whom I left a bag and she said she was in tears over this gift bag. You are loving the selfless way Jesus loves.

“Do we pass the test?” In so many ways yes, you do! But as in everything, we need to grow. We live in the Christian Church culture that is a consumerism culture— another expression of a me-first culture. The question in looking for a church home is what can this church do for me? Instead of asking, after inquiring about whether the church is biblically sound, can this church help me grow into maturity in Christ so I can serve others in that church and outside the church. In the way we love others in the church and outside the church, may people say about

us, as they said about Christians in Tertulian's day, "See how they love one another!"