

March 7, 2021

“The Mark of the Christian”
John 13:34-35

FCF: The critical difference a missing ingredient can make
PROPOSITION: (magnet) That the world may know we are Jesus’ disciples,
(anchor) we are to bear the mark.

SCRIPTURE INTRODUCTION:

There are some ingredients we must not leave out. Think of salt. Imagine french fries, potato chips, popcorn, or corn on the cob without it. Salt draws out flavor, making a tremendous difference in the enjoyment of a meal. Of course, before refrigeration, in most parts of the world salt was not just for seasoning but preserving. It was rubbed into meat to keep it from spoiling. Those grains may be small, seemingly insignificant. But you can really tell when it’s missing.

When we consider the inner life of the local church and its outward face to the world, what is that often missing ingredient? Jesus tells us. The love of Christians for one another.

SCRIPTURE READING: [John 13:34-35](#)

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

SERMON INTRODUCTION:

In the summer of 2014, Mosul, Iraq fell to the radical jihadists of ISIS, terrorists so extreme that even al Qaeda disaffiliated itself from their barbarism. The jihadists implemented Shariah law and began ruthlessly persecuting Christians. Their message to Mosul’s Christians was: convert, pay a fine, or die. To identify Christian homes and businesses, the jihadists marked the buildings with a symbol. They painted the 14th letter of the Arabic alphabet, the equivalent to the Roman letter N. It stands for Nasara or Nazarenes, a pejorative Arabic word for Christians. The interesting thing was the response of many around the world - in solidarity with the persecuted church of Mosul, telling their story and taking that mark upon themselves.

Over the centuries, there have been a host of marks Christians have used to identify themselves. But it’s worth knowing Jesus has given us a mark of His own, a means by which the watching world can know whether we are His followers. And that is the point of our text.

The setting is the eve of Jesus’ betrayal and death. He knows the time has come and is preparing His disciples, pressing in on the most essential things. And so He speaks of the need of His own to love one another. Francis Schaeffer referred to this as the mark of the Christian. And for good reason. That the world may know we are Jesus’ disciples, we are to bear the mark.

To live this out in any real way, there are several things we need to grapple with - at least these three. First, the command itself. Second, the promise given. And, third, the condition.

I. THE COMMAND

First, the command ([READ John 13:34](#)). Let me quickly recap the last two weeks here.

A) To Love One Another

1. All people

Who are we to love? All people. Every person is our neighbor, made in God’s image.

2. But especially every Christians

So we are to show love to every person. But most especially to every Christian. For we are a family with a shared relationship and partnership, tied together by the deepest bond imaginable.

B) As He Has Loved Us

So that's who we are to love. But how are we to love? As Jesus has loved us.

1. Sacrificial

This is an agape love, a sacrificial love. It is a love that gives of self for the sake of another, that pours itself out for the flourishing of another person, no matter the cost. For it is a costly love.

2. Imitation

This is part of what it means to be a follower of Christ, to be His disciples, to live in imitation of Christ. Which means we are to love who He loves, as He loves - as He loves us even now.

This is the new command Jesus has given us.

Application:

As followers of this Master, as subjects of this King, as disciples of Jesus, our ears are to be sharply tuned to His voice, our feet set to run long in His path. Our very agenda must be His.

And what has Jesus said? That the world may know we are His, we are to bear the mark.

II. THE PROMISE

That's the command. And Jesus has tied a promise to this ([READ John 13:34-35a](#)).

A) Universal Scope

1. Not narrow

Note the universal scope. This is not narrowly confined to a particular time, place, or people.

2. But broad

It is broad. This will affect anyone who sees it. It will cut across and through all lines.

B) Clear Message

It will impact everyone who witnesses this. For it will send a clear message.

1. A distinction

There is distinction, a real difference. We look the same but there is something otherworldly.

2. As "Christians"

We read in Acts 11 of the church in Antioch. The people of the city could see that these Jesus followers had a completely "other" identity and loyalty. So they called them "Christians".

They could see it. Jesus' command comes with this promise. It's really something.

Application:

This goes beyond any marketing or publicity strategy. This is far more vital than any food we could serve, facilities we could open, courses we could offer, programs we could plan, or even sermons we could preach. Jesus says that, above all those things, there's one universal powerful draw that will work like a magnet upon the hearts of the watching world. Just one.

That the world may know we are His disciples, we must bear the mark.

III. THE CONDITION

What is this mark? That takes us to the condition of the promise (**READ John 13:34-35**).

A) Observable Love

1. Not theoretical

This is an observable love. It is not simply an organizational or confessional unity that places us under a common banner. It is not even the spiritual unity we share with our fellow Christians.

2. But visible

No, it is something visible. Jesus clearly implies that this is a love and a unity that can be seen.

B) Genuine Love

It has to be an observable love. It has to be a genuine sacrificial love one for another.

1. Not our shared beliefs

Please hear me. The world cares nothing for doctrinal statements or spiritual convictions. Why should they? Why would we expect any sort of applause there? We live in a post-truth world.

2. But our mutual love

The world cares nothing for our shared beliefs. But our mutual love can get the world's attention like a comet blazing across the night sky. Our truth claims may well mean nothing. But love will land. It's what Francis Schaeffer called "the final apologetic". One of the great preachers of the early church, John Chrysostom, pushed this even further in a sermon and wrote (**READ**):

Passing over the miracles that they were to perform, (Jesus) makes love the distinguishing mark of his followers...Miracles do not attract unbelievers as much as the way you live your life. And nothing brings about a proper life as much as love.

Illustration:

Tertullian, a North African theologian in the 2nd and 3rd century, often took "the best defense is a good offense" approach and went after the pagan ideas of his day. He knew the reputation his fellow Christians had among the Romans - the impact of the ethics, morals, and lives of the church - and could imagine others saying (**READ**) "See how they love one another!"

Application:

What is it that should stand out? Our sacrificial service offered to each other. And also what Schaeffer referred to as "the difference of our differences" - meaning that our conflicts are always to be marked by both truth and love. Never separated, always together. That stands out.

But there's another observation worth noting in our text. Jesus is giving the world the right to judge whether we are Christians by how we treat each other. He has given the world that right. Which means that, if they take Him up on that and take us to task, calling our words into question, our first response must be to drop our defenses, go home, close the door, and weep.

Weep. Why? That the world may know we are Jesus' disciples, we are to bear the mark.

CONCLUSION:

This is Jesus' word to us from John 13. We hear something similar in John 17 (**READ John 17:20-23**). There's a subtle distinction here. In John 13, Jesus says our love for each other is how the world will know we are who we say we are. In John 17, Jesus says our love for each other is how the world will know the Christian message is true. These are tremendous things to consider and should drive us to our knees in both repentance and dependence upon His grace.

Jesus wants this for the world. He wants peoples from all nations, cultures, groups, backgrounds, ages, classes and occupations to know. "And this is how they will know," He says. "By your love. It will be by your love. Know that I want them to know. I want them to know."

Do we? Do we want this? What do our lives say in answer to that? Do we love?

That the world may know we are Jesus' disciples, we are to bear the mark.

PROPOSITION: (magnet) That the world may know we are Jesus' disciples,
(anchor) we are to bear the mark.