

**EASTER 5 2010 "Love Taken to Court"**  
**John 13:31-35**

We begin with a little Bible study on this text. You will note in these 4 verses from John 13 that Jesus uses the word "glorify" or "glorified" 4 times in the first 2 verses and the word "love" 4 times in the last 2 verses.

"Glory" and "Love" might go together well in romantic songs and movies as we dream about the "glory of love". But in the Bible these words are used to describe something with more substance than romantic relationships.

"Love" in the Bible is used as an action word, not a feeling word. The world thinks first of "love" as a warm feeling. In reality most of the time that kind of "love" is infatuation. Not all love is "warm and fuzzy". True love is proven by actions that benefit another. We normally don't put "love and diapers" together but we should. Love causes sleep deprivation in young mothers and anxiety in fathers of teenagers who are out late at night. Love means paying the bills for your family and saving for college. Love is letting go of control over another. Love means saying "I'm sorry"... contrary to a famous line in a movie many years ago. There's not much "glory" in admitting your mistakes and asking for forgiveness.

Yet Jesus put "Love" and "glory" together. Jesus is saying that when we love one another we are giving glory to God. Jesus proved this in his own death. Giving up his life on the cross was love divine. As the incarnate God among us, Christ's sacrificial love for us, which led to his death and resurrection gives glory to God. In the same way, when we love one someone we are giving God glory because God is the very source of sacrificial love.

Jesus told his disciples and us... **"Love one another"**. In saying this Jesus certainly could see clearly into the human heart. One of our greatest needs as humans is the need to be loved. In order to have a meaningful life, to enjoy the richness of life we need to be loved. Studies done with the higher primates have shown that where an infant animal is deprived of nurture, closeness, bonding and love at an early age, that animal grows up to be maladjusted to its peers exhibiting all kinds of anti-social behavior. If it is true that monkeys need love how much more true for us. There is no greater tragedy for any person than to go through life deprived of love. When Jesus said, **"Love one another"** he knew that we need to be loved.

The flip side of this great truth is that we need to show love to others. A person who only takes the love of others without showing love to others soon becomes turned-in on self and, like a lake with no outlet, becomes stagnant, lifeless. God has made us to be carriers of His love to others by letting His love flow thru us. We find fulfillment and joy in life by loving others.

Of course, how we love is subject to our imperfection as humans. No one can love perfectly. And we are quick to condemn or judge others when they fail to act in love. Yet the command of Jesus is to love. Jesus did not say, "I have a suggestion you might want to consider— why don't you try loving one another." No. Jesus commands us to love. It is not an option for Xians. And love means action. So, how do we measure up to this command of Jesus to love? If we were to go to court and be judged on the basis of our performance of this command how would we fare?

Courts are places where judgments are rendered. But you don't have to go to the courthouse in order to be judged. We are all under constant evaluation and judgment. There are at least 4 courts that we face each day of our life. So, let's take love to court.

1. The first court is the court of public opinion. How we love one another is judged by this court every day. But this court goes on to judge us not only in the area of how we love but in every other area of life as well. You and I are judged by how we dress, the kind of work we do, where we live, our economic status, etc. While this is the lowest court we face it is often the one we fear the most. What do people think of me?

This court also makes the most mistakes in its judgments. It has been so since antiquity. Socrates was condemned for corrupting the youth of ancient Greece, now he is recognized as a great ethical teacher. Martin Luther was judged by this lowest court and a price was put on his head. Yet the world now recognizes him as a great defender of the faith. Some of the great civil rights leaders in our time were judged by their contemporaries as trouble makers but now we recognize them as great leaders for social justice who put love into action.

Yet you and I worry about what others think about us. We try to get a favorable verdict from the court of public opinion. We want acceptance so badly we will often go along with the crowd even when it is wrong to do so.

In the court of public opinion, love is measured by whatever is currently in fashion.

2. The second court we face is the court of history. History will weigh each of our lives in the balances and determine if our actions were good or bad, loving or selfish. When you and I are dead and gone then the facts of our lives can be and will be judged more dispassionately. The court of history has a way of screening out the hype and fluff of a person's life and leaving that which is solid in place for judgment. It is then that the ACTIONS of love will be seen as the greatest legacy of a person's life. The great sports heroes and rock stars will be forgotten and in their place we remember persons who acted in love like Louis Pasteur or Mother Teresa who gave their lives working for the uplifting of others or made a contribution that has improved the lives of all. And then there are the countless common folks that faithfully fulfill their roles in life without the world's notice. The mothers and fathers who love and nurture and care for their families working to support the ones they love. The court of history may soon forget these unsung heroes and heroines but their contributions to our lives and the life of the world when taken together is immeasurable. They have acted in love.

3. The third court you and I face is the court of the self. This court works overtime, daily, even hourly pronouncing either self approval or self condemnation. But this court can not be trusted either, for the timid are often too hard on themselves and take themselves too seriously while others think more highly of themselves than they ought to think passing judgment on others while excusing their own behavior. And no one of us is completely objective when it comes to self-evaluation.

4. The fourth court we face is the court of God. Only God knows the heart and mind of each person. And what God sees in us is the unvarnished truth. No one can hide from God. The thoughts of our hearts and minds are an open book to God who knows every thought and sees every action. The eyes of the Lord are on everyone. And God is the perfect judge. It is a terrifying experience to be judged by one who is perfect. But at the same time it is therapeutic. There is something cleansing in being stripped of all pretenses, all defenses, to be thrown totally on the mercy of the court with the cry, "God be merciful to me, a sinner."

Only as we stand before God and his court are we forgiven for our failure to love. Only then do the lower three courts lose their grip on us. Only when we stand in the court of Almighty God and face his judgment and experience his grace are we freed from the judgments of the lower courts. For God is both our judge and our savior. On the one hand God judges ...and on the other hand God goes to the lengths of a cross to forgive, rescue and save.

The Bible describes God as being loving, merciful and just. The high court of God is a court of perfect justice. But God's justice is tempered by mercy and God's mercy is founded on God's love. And when God's love begets mercy, and mercy tempers justice then justice produces peace with God. And when we are at peace with God we are free to live without fear of any court in heaven or on earth and we can love others as we have been loved by God.

The Psalmist said it well, "If thou oh Lord, shouldst mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand? But there is forgiveness with thee that thou mayest be feared." (Ps. 130:3). This is the key... "there is forgiveness with thee..." God does judge, but God also forgives because of Jesus and the cross. This is the good news we need to hear every day... "Your sins are forgiven in Jesus....the high court has declared you "guilty but forgiven" and sets you free." Thanks be to God. AMEN