

**“Making a Messiah” / Unit 4: Verdicts
Sermon 1: Our Verdict / March 30, 2019**

Key Texts: John 13.34-35; Matthew 22.36-40; Luke 10.25-37

Key Words: Love one another, As I have loved you, Old Testament, Old Covenant, Contract, They will know

Summary: Jesus didn't come to add to the Old Covenant, he came to replace it. And the way was to do life with God, for God, God's way under this new covenant is encompassed by this one new "law": Love one another, as I have loved you.

Sometimes you don't have to choose. Other times you have to choose whether you want to or not. So ... what is your verdict on some of these? If you were on the jury, if you had to make a call, based on what you know now, what's your verdict?

- Did he collude with the Russians to steal the election ... or not? And then, did he obstruct the investigation into the collusions ... or not? Based on what you really know - not on your feelings about the man; based on what you really know -- what's your verdict? And ... in the end ... will it matter what you choose?
- Or this one: What's your verdict? Was he really attacked - was it a hate crime? Or was it a setup? What's your verdict? Based on what you know, should the charges have been dismissed and his record expunged? And ... in the end ... will it matter what you choose?
- Or this one: What's your verdict? Do you think we have 12 years to turn things around before the damage to our ecosystem will be so devastating that climate change will wreak catastrophic damage to the world as we know it? Extreme heat, drought, floods, poverty ... stuff like that? So, whatever the cost, no matter how extreme it sounds, do you think a green new deal is absolutely worth it? And in the end, will it matter what you choose?

We make judgments on stuff like that every day. Usually we don't do anything about it; but still, we make judgments on stuff like that every day. We love to see ourselves as part of the jury, rendering verdicts, making things right. Sometimes we do our homework before rendering our verdicts. Sometimes we don't. Sometimes we try to do something about it when we judge something is wrong. Sometimes we don't; we just like telling people what we think. And sometimes we ... have no

opinion at all, because we just don't really care. And usually ... it won't matter ... that much ... that we don't care. But sometimes you have to choose, and your choice will matter ... for you, and for those around you ... forever.

Now, Jesus claimed to be God's Messiah. He claims he is the Son of God. He claims he came to save you because you need saving, and you can't save yourself ... he claims. He claims he is your Lord. In fact, he claims that ultimately he is the Lord of everything. He claims that if you will acknowledge him as your Lord he will make your life way better. And he claims that if you will stick with him till death, death won't win; in fact he will gift you with eternal life.

And he claims that you have to choose, you have to make a call, to render a verdict. Now, we've been laying out some of the evidence: the godlike power he demonstrated, the godlike words he spoke, and the godlike claims he made. Now it's time to make a call, because if he was right, you will have to choose! Are you going to be a Jesus follower ... or not? And if you say 'yes,' what does that look like? You see, there is a difference between a Jesus fan and a Jesus follower. I think a lot of "Christians" are Jesus fans, they are Jesus admirers ... but not really Jesus followers. So, what does following Jesus look like? At its heart, what does it mean? ... So, here goes: Our verdict.

Okay, our Bible is divided into two parts, right? There's the Old Testament: 39 books; and the New Testament: 27 books. The old, and the new. I know, the new part doesn't feel new! The New Testament is nearly 2000 years old. But it is still new in the sense that it ... replaces ... the old. Now, when we say Old "Testament" and New "Testament," we mean Old "Covenant" and New "Covenant." The Old Covenant was the way we used to do life with God, for God, God's way - before Jesus. The New Covenant is the way we do life with God, for God, God's way now - after Jesus. The Old Testament lays out how the people of God used to do it. The New Testament tells us how we do it now.

It's kind of like a contract or a will. If you sign a new contract, the terms of the new contract replace the terms of the old one, right? Listen guys, Jesus came to establish a new Covenant, a New Testament, a new contract between God and man. He didn't come here to add

another chapter to the old, he came to do something new - a new way to do life with God, for God, God's way. He came here to give us a brand new way to find peace with God, and a brand new way to be a God follower. A new covenant, with a new set of rules. And what we agree to, when we sign on to this New Covenant is a whole lot simpler, and a whole lot harder than living under the Old Covenant with God.

Now Jesus had been dropping these breadcrumbs, these teasers, these hints that he was going to do something brand new, something that would replace the old. He'd say things like this: "Do you remember what Moses told you to do? That's the old way; I'm giving you a new way." Or, "Do you remember how your Bible told you to do life with God? Do you remember the 10 commandments? Well I'm giving you a different way to do life with God." It was audacious! Go back, read the Sermon on the Mount! Matthew 5. Jesus was setting up something new.

Or, do you remember the time Jesus said, "Something greater than the temple is here." "Something greater than the temple ... the temple of God ... the locus of God's presence on earth ... Something greater than all that is standing right here in front of you ..." What did he say? Did he really mean that? Isn't that kind of the perfect illustration of megalomania? Who does Jesus think he is? The temple is the center of our life with God, for God, God's way, they believed. If you're claiming to be greater than the temple, are you saying we don't need God's temple any more!? No ... man ... can say something like that without being the most arrogant man, or the twisted man ever, can he? But Jesus is dropping a breadcrumb: "I am bigger than the temple, and I'm doing something brand new!"

And then, Jesus kept talking about the Kingdom, the Kingdom of God. And he kept claiming to be the King. But he refused all the accoutrements of a king. It was just weird! A kingdom without a country, a kingdom without walls, how would that work? A kingdom without an army, a kingdom without rank ... at least the way everyone else calculates rank. Kind of an upside-down kingdom. In his kingdom, Jesus says, those on top don't get served, the ones on top do the serving. The greatest go to the back of the line ... in this ... new ... kingdom. And all the people our world devalues ... they matter, in this new Kingdom! A lot! Women, children ... they didn't count in Jesus'

world; but they are infinitely valuable in his ... new ... kingdom. The Gentiles - they are welcome too. Even the worst of the worst - tax collectors and sinners, telemarketers, debt collectors, used car salesmen, dentists, lawyers, even journalists and politicians they are infinitely valuable, to this ... different kind of King. This was something brand new!

And the laws of this new Kingdom ... they are just different ... brand new. Jesus said, "It's not about what a man looks like on the outside, it's about his heart." We look at the outside of a man. We clean up the outside, so we look good - on the outside. Jesus said, "Not anymore. God doesn't measure a man the way we do. He's not fooled by the outside. He measures the heart." In fact, sometimes, Jesus says, the holiest people have the dirtiest hands. And sometimes clean hands mask dirty hearts. He was building something new!

Jesus just kept dropping all these clues; he left a whole trail of breadcrumbs. ... And then he went to Jerusalem to pick a fight ... a fight he intended to lose ... kind of ... a least for a couple days. He went to Jerusalem to launch something brand new. And it's kind of like: "Crown me, or Kill me! But you will not ignore me! I will have your verdict!"

It's a Sunday, or a Monday, about the first of April - just a few days before their Feast of Passover. And Jesus rides into Jerusalem like some kind of Messiah-King. He created quite the stir! Then he goes into the temple and starts flipping over tables, picking a fight with the biggest bullies in town. "Crown me or kill me! But you will not ignore me. I will have your verdict!"

And the bigwigs chose to kill him. They started scheming; they started looking for an opening; they started looking for an excuse ... to kill him. But everywhere he went the people crowded around, and too many of them were cheering him on. They needed to discredit him. And then they needed to get him alone. And they needed to work up a case that would get the Romans to execute him.

So they start setting these traps. They'd send their guys into the crowd to try to trip Jesus up. They tried to get him to say something that would cause the people to turn on him. They tried to get him to say

something that would give them an excuse to arrest him, and try him, and kill him. Matthew and Mark and Luke tell us about some of these traps. We call them the “Controversy Stories.” Tuesday, and Wednesday, and Thursday he out there teaching - right out in the open, right in the Temple - and they are trying to trip him up. But it’s hard to argue with God. ... Actually, it’s not. But it’s hard to argue with God and win!

But then something broke their way. One of Jesus’ guys turned traitor ... a guy named Judas. I guess Judas was disillusioned. I guess he had hoped that Jesus was going to set up an earthly kingdom, and he didn’t. Or maybe Judas just wanted the cash, I don’t know. Maybe he was just a jerk. Bottom line, he offered to ... well, to be a Judas, to be a snitch, to let them know when and where they could arrest Jesus with no crowds around.

But what was weird was that Jesus wasn’t trying to evade arrest, or to escape death; he just wanted to pick the time. In fact, he come to town ... to die. That was part of the brand new. That was the key to this brand new ... testament ... covenant ... his dying ... and his rising. But he had loose ends to wrap up first.

So, Thursday night was the reveal. Friday they would kill him; Sunday he’d walk out of this tomb. He knew it all ... in fact it was wall part of his plan. His dying, and then his kicking death in the tail, well ... was the foundation for this new Covenant between God and man. So, Thursday night was the reveal. It was their “last supper.” That’s what we call it: “The Last Supper.” They thought it would be kind of a normal “Passover” meal. That’s why everybody was in Jerusalem: to celebrate Passover, when God used Moses to rescue the Israelites from Egypt and then he led them to the desert where he made a “Testament,” a “Covenant” with them ... the Old Testament.

But Jesus had come to change all that. He took the bread and the juice, and he said: “From now on, these are different. These are not about God’s rescue of Israel. This is my body, and my blood ... from now on. And my death is not for the rescue of Israel; it is for the rescue of every man, every woman, everywhere, from now on. My body, my blood - will purchase a new covenant through which your sins can be forgiven, and you can find peace with God. It’s ... grace!

But he won't force us into this new covenant with God. He let's us choose - the most important choice you'll ever make. And when you accept his grace, you also agree to a different path, a different way to do life with God, for God, God's way ... something new. If you say yes to Jesus, this is what you agree to ... full disclosure.

Now ... again ... Jesus had been dropping these breadcrumbs along the way. (Matthew 22.35) In fact, just a couple days earlier, during one of those controversy stories where the Jewish leaders are trying to trap him, to set him up, one guy - this Pharisee - tried to trap Jesus with this question. He says, "Teacher, which is the most important commandment in the law of Moses?" (22.36) There all these laws in the Old Testament, the Old Covenant: there are the 10 big ones, and if you count them all, they counted a total of 613 rules, laws in the Old Testament, the Old Covenant, the Old Contract with God. "Well, which one is #1, Jesus?" And this lawyer was ready! Whatever Jesus said, he was ready with his trap ... he thought.

So, Jesus says, "Here's #1: You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment." Which was the Sunday School answer. It came right out of Deuteronomy chapter 6.4-5 - the most important verses in their Bible ... to a Jew. That's what any good Jew would say! But Jesus didn't stop there. He went to another verse, over in Leviticus, that no one had ever connected to the Shema. And Jesus says, "There is a second one equally important." Equally important?! What do you mean, equally important?! Jesus says, "There is a second one equally important: Love your neighbor as yourself!" In fact ... "If you are really going to love God," Jesus says, "You are going to love your neighbor as yourself." "In fact, if you're not loving your neighbor as yourself, you're not loving God!" Guys, that was a huge, huge breadcrumb. In fact - it's almost the whole loaf ... almost!

Jesus is connecting the vertical with the horizontal. He is connecting our love for God, with our love for God's people. It is not an either-or, it's a both-and. The second is not optional, for Jesus followers. The two are inextricably intertwined. They are like peanut butter and jelly, peanut

butter and chocolate ... peanut butter and bacon! They are just made for each other.

And that was ... brand new! You see, in their world ... and ours ... the two are not connected ... inextricably. A man can love God, and ... hate people ... or despise them, or marginalize them, or abuse them. "I'm okay with God! I go to church; I confess my sins; I've been baptized; I take the Lord's Supper; I pay my tithes. I'm okay with God." But ... look how you're treating your husband, or your wife. Listen how you talk to your son, or your dad, or your neighbor. What about the people you walked on at work, or posted about on Facebook, or ... just treated like they didn't matter? "I know, but God and me are good." Really?! ... Jesus says. And guys ... that was the religion of the first century; in fact, that pretty much defines the religion of every century; in fact, that pretty much defines the religion even of so many who identify as ... "Jesus followers."

And Jesus says, "All that changes. I have come to establish a New Covenant, a New Testament, a new way of doing life with God, for God, God's way. I haven't come to add to the old rules, I have come to replace them. And in my kingdom, obedience to the first great commandment will be measured by your obedience to the second." In fact, these two are pretty much all you need. They are pretty much all ... we need!

Love God with all you have, and love your neighbor as you love yourself. Well, who is my neighbor?" They tried to catch Jesus with that one, one time. Well who is my neighbor? Because, if I can choose my neighbor I can probably make it work. And Jesus just destroys that loophole with story, about a Good Samaritan. Do you remember that story? Jesus says, "Your neighbor is not just another Jew; your neighbor is not someone like you; your neighbor is not just someone you like. Your neighbor is anyone - anyone - who has a need that you can help. In other words - listen - your love for God, and my love for God will be measured by our actions towards those who are nothing like us, towards those we may not 'like,' towards those who may not 'like' us. Which can actually work, if you figure out that you don't have to like someone to love them. Anyway, these are breadcrumbs, pointing to something brand new.

Well it's Thursday. This is the day for the reveal. This is when Jesus spells out the New Testament, the New Covenant, the new contract God was making with us through his own death ... in our place, and through his resurrection. And this Jesus clarifies what we agree to when we sign on. It was their last meal together ... "The Last Supper." The night was full of weird. First, Jesus ... washes their feet! That was flat out awkward. And then he tells them that they're going to have to learn to wash each other's feet ... which is even more awkward. And then Jesus tells them there is a traitor in their midst, and Judas leaves ... inexplicably. And then Jesus highjacks their most sacred meal. The Passover meal used to be about Moses, and the Exodus, God's rescue of Israel. Jesus says, "Not any more! From now on this bread is about my body, broken for you. This juice is about my blood, shed for you. This is about a New Testament, a New Covenant, a new contract between God and man ... between God and every man. This one is not just for the Jews; this Covenant is for every man, every woman, everywhere, for all time.

And here's the deal, when you accept God's grace, here's what you are agreeing to do. These are kind of like the rules for those who sign on to this new Covenant with God. You see, every covenant lays out what is expected of those who sign on, right? Well, Jesus says, this one is going to be way simpler than the old one, and ... way harder. There won't be 613 rules this time. There won't be any 10 core commandments. There will be just two ... which are really just one. And the disciples are like, "Can Jesus do that?! Can Jesus just ... tear up the old Covenant and replace it with a new one?! Can he really change the rules?! God's rules?! Wouldn't that be kind of like ... playing God?!"

Well, Yeah! And Jesus says this. He says, "I am giving you "a" new commandment (not 10, just one - which pretty much encompasses the big two. Here it is): Love each other. (Now if he had stopped there, it wouldn't be so demanding. But he didn't stop there. He says,) Just as I have loved you, (In the same way I have loved you, with the same kind of love that I have showed you) you should love each other. (Huh?! ... In fact, he says) Your love for one another - your love for one another -- will prove to the world that you are my disciples." (John 13.34-35)

That's what proves we are his disciples?! Really?! That's not what most people think!

- People think it's our "Doctrine," what we believe: believing the right stuff about God, and Jesus - that's what proves to world that we are his disciples, right?
- Or maybe: it's our "religion." We do church, we pray, reading your Bible, we give, we serve. That's what proves to the world that we are his disciples, right?
- Or maybe, it's our "Morality." We don't cuss, we don't chew, we don't run with girls who do. Surely that's what proves to the world that we are Jesus followers, right?

And Jesus says ... "No ... Your love for one another - and I'm not talking about your kind of love, I'm talking about my kind of love - that is what will prove to the world that you are my disciples," that you are Jesus followers. Holy cow! Do you think that would take their breath away? And ours?

"Matthew, do you remember when we met?" "Yeah, Jesus." "Do you remember what were you doing?" "Yeah, I was a ... tax collector ... kind of hated by most everyone. Kind of hated myself, really." "Do you remember what I said to you?" "Yeah, you invited me to follow you." ... "Peter, do you remember what you were thinking? You weren't happy, were you? None of you guys were. Matthew, do you remember where we went? Yeah, you went to my house and you ... kind of ... loved on ... my ... friends." "Well, for the rest of your life, the kind of grace I showed you that day, that will be your gift to every person you ever meet." Love each other, as I have loved you.

"Nathaniel, do you remember when we met? Do you remember what you said about my hometown - Nazareth? Do you remember how you dissed my parents, my friends? Do you remember how you said, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" "Yeah, I remember." "Do you remember how I responded to you?" "Yeah, you invited me to be one of your closest followers." "Well, I want you to offer that same grace and acceptance to everyone you meet however they treat you."

"Peter, do you remember the time when everyone wanted to walk away; in fact, you all were thinking about quitting on me? Do you remember

when I asked you straight out if you wanted to ... unfollow me? And you were smart enough to be honest, because you knew I'd see through you. Do you guys remember how you all wanted to unfollow me, but I never chose to give up on you? Well, that's how I want you to treat each other ... for the rest of your lives."

"And guys, you ain't seen nothing yet. I'm going to take this love thing to a whole new level. And I want you to remember that to follow me means you will love others in the same way, with the same kind of love that I have loved you; in the same way, with the same kind of love that I am about to show you ... tomorrow ... You'll understand."

By this one thing, by this one thing they will know that you are ... not fans, not admirers ... but Jesus followers. It's not just "If you love Jesus," because only God will know that for sure. It's not just "If you love God," because only God will know that for sure. By this one thing "they" will know that we are Jesus followers - not fans, followers - if we love one another, as he has loved us." And that's pretty much it. Do this, and everything else pretty much falls into place.

Those are the rules, of this ... brand New Covenant! Far less complicated than the 613 rules of the Old Covenant; and far more demanding. And the early Christians got it. In fact, the apostle Paul, the greatest teacher of the early church, put it like this. He says, "God's whole law can be summed up in this one command: "Love your neighbor as yourself." (Galatians 5.14) Every imperative in the New Testament is an application of this command. The Old Covenant, the old way of doing life with God, for God, God's way was about following a bunch of rules; The New Covenant, the new way of doing life with God, for God, God's way, is about accepting his sacrifice for us, and then trying to live out this one rule. And when we get this one right, everything else falls into place. When we don't, well ... we ask for his grace - which is always amazing, and we try again.

Guys, this is so liberating, so distinctive, so upside-down, and so healing when it is lived out. It makes life better, and it makes us better at life. In a culture that prizes self, loving each other as Christ has loved us - that stands out. In a culture that prizes getting even and revenge, loving each other as Christ has loved us - that stands out. In a culture that

uses, and abuses, and despises, and marginalizes whole classes of people ... well, they will know we are Jesus followers when we love each other ... and them ... in the same way he loves us.

And when we get it right ...

- People will want to work for us even though they don't want to believe like us, because they crave being loved the way Jesus loves us.
- And people will want us to work for them even though they don't want to believe like us, because they ache for what we have tasted.
- And people will be happy their kid is dating a Jesus follower. Because, even though we're kind of weird, we treat people right, because we love our Jesus ... and that is captivating.
- And when we get it right, people will want a church like this in their town, and people will be drawn to a church like this ... because, even though we are kind of weird, something inside them can only be healed by what we have tasted.

This is what it means to say Yes to Jesus. We accept his grace, and we commit to loving each other in the same way he has loved us. And when we fail - which we will - we ask his forgiveness, and we taste his grace again, and we start again. And we taste ... life.

They showed up that Thursday thinking they were going to celebrate Passover. They left that night with their minds blown. Everything was changed: a new covenant with God - for even man, every woman, every where, for all time. And a new rule to live by, which basically takes care of everything else.

We go to these tables with a different perspective than the disciples had that night. Because we knew what happened that Friday; and we know what happened on that Sunday morning. We know what God's verdict on Jesus is. So we are in! Guys when you come to the table this morning, this is about accepting his grace all over again. And it's also about committing to loving each other - just as he loved us - all over again.

We are going to do the Lord's Supper a little differently this morning. Tear off a small piece of bread, and a cup - take it back to your seat, and hold it till we take it together. ...

Luke 22.19-20: On the night Jesus was betrayed ... "He took some bread and gave thanks to God for it. Then he broke it in pieces and gave it to the disciples, saying, "This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me." ... After supper he took another cup of wine and said, "This cup is the new covenant between God and his people—an agreement confirmed with my blood, which is poured out as a sacrifice for you. Do this in remembrance of me." ...

Prayer of thanks, of recommitment.

Teaser

- New covenant; new fine print - heads are spinning
- Let's go to Gethsemane to pray; we need to go pray now
 - Haven't really celebrated Passover, changed the rules, the terms - so confusing
- They get there, all tired, start to drift off
- Hear something, wake up
- Judas and soldiers
- A skirmish, some blood is spilled
- Jesus arrested; rest run; taken for trials
 - One comes and hides
 - They hear the trials go badly
 - They are terrified ...
- That's next week