

“If You Love Me”
October 22, 2023
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This is the day that the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it! Good morning, Church! I want to read a passage of Scripture today that comes from the Gospel according to John, chapter 15, beginning with verse 9. This is one of the longest discourses that Jesus has in the New Testament. We're going to read just a fraction of it. Jesus says, “As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you. Now remain in my love. If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed the Father's commands and remain in His love. I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command. I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father, I have made known to you. You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit--fruit that will last. Then the Father will give you what you ask in my name. This is my command: Love each other.” May God bless the reading of His Word.

If your spouse or significant other begins a conversation with, “If you love me...” I don't even have to finish that, do I? You know one of two things. You know either they are joking, or it's about to get serious really fast. Jesus said this and implied this numerous times his last night with the disciples. You see, when a person has the privilege, and I say privilege, the privilege of knowing that their time is short, things get really serious, really fast. That night He spoke primarily about His number one concern, and that was that they love one another as He loved them. He spoke also of the coming and purpose of the Holy Spirit, and then He talked about our relationship to one another. But primarily, He talked about His command. That is, that we love one another the way He loved us.

Today we're going to look at Jesus' command to love one another as He loved us. Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. You've never heard that before, have you? I've never talked with you about that before, have I? I can hear in my mind: “mildly entertaining and completely predictable.” For those of you who don't know that inside joke, in my second church there was a gentleman there whose attendance was perfect until I got there. And then it began to wane, and over the next couple of years it diminished down to about once a month. And when I asked him why, he said, “Pastor, I find you to be mildly entertaining and completely predictable.” And when he defined that, he said, “Well, I find your stories entertaining. But no matter what the scripture is, no matter what the sermon title, you always end up telling us to love God and love one another.” And for the first twenty years after that, it offended me. (That's supposed to be funny!) The first twenty years it offended me, but then after that, and the more I thought about it, the more I embraced it.

When Jesus was asked, “What is the greatest commandment?”, He said, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your mind, all your soul, and all your strength. And the second is equal to that one: Love your neighbor as yourself. On these two hang all the Law and the Prophets.” Now, I brought my father's big-print Bible to illustrate this. That means that that one command, to love God with all you have and love your neighbor as yourself, covers that much of the Bible (over 3/4ths of the pages). All of it.

Love the Lord your God with all of your heart, all your mind, all of your soul, and all of your strength, and love your neighbor as yourself, covers this much of the Bible. On the night that Jesus was betrayed, He said, "A new commandment I give to you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you too must love one another. By this will all people know you are my disciples, by the way you love one another." And that commandment covers all of the New Testament, this part of the Bible (less than 1/4 of the pages.) So, in my calculation, if we love God with all of our heart, all of our mind, and all of our soul, and all of our strength, and we love others as Jesus loves us, that covers everything, absolutely, positively, unequivocally everything. If those that I have served through the years practiced only one thing that I preached, and it was this, it would be enough. It's really that simple; it's really that important; and it's really that hard. So, my prayer for you is that you will be haunted by this for the rest of your life. Every time you think of this church and every time you think of me, you'll go, "Love God and love everybody else!" and it'll be enough. Do you know of anything our world needs more right now?

All right, let's spend a few moments talking about this passage. Jesus said, "Obey my commands. If you love me, obey my commands." He said, "My command to you is to remain in my love, as I have remained in the Father's love." How do you remain in Jesus' love? You remain in Jesus' love by imitating Christ, by doing what Christ did, by imitating Jesus Christ. And how do you imitate Christ? By loving God and loving each other the way He loves us. He doesn't want to hear our talk; He wants to see our walk. Love one another, as He loves us. Jesus went on to say, "If you love me, love each other as I have loved you." And how did he love us? By laying down His life for us unconditionally, sacrificially, without hesitation or reservation or qualification. He gave His life willingly. No one took it. It wasn't compulsion. He did so voluntarily. And He asked us to love the way He did. This is Jesus' command, and this is our goal. I don't know about you, but I'm not there yet. I'm not there yet. And I know me. I can be a knot-head. It is true. And I know me. When I take my last breath, I'm fairly confident I won't be there yet. But I also know that I'm hard-headed, and I will still be trying. I won't be there, but I'll be pushing forward. Jesus said, "You did not choose me, I chose you." And for what purpose were we chosen? Well, first of all, I want you to know you were picked. You were chosen. You're special! But chosen for what? Chosen to imitate Christ, chosen to demonstrate His love to the world, chosen to be the image of Christ to our society, chosen to love as Jesus loves. He ends this passage by saying, "This is my command" (singular): "Love each other." It is really that simple, and it is really that difficult: loving people the way Jesus loves us. I wish you could have seen the children's faces (a reference to the children's sermon) when I said there are people out there that are hard to love. Most of them nodded their heads in a knowing way.

So, this is not something I say today: "From now on I am going to love like Jesus loved." It is a continual, perpetual process that we work on, and we try to get better at continually. So I want you to hear that, and I want you to not beat yourself up as you say, "I'm not there yet." Look around. Everybody you see is not there yet. It is a process. And when we draw our last breath, we will still be in that process. So don't beat yourself up, but resolve to get better every day. I figure, at this point in my life, every year I'm perfect for a few seconds. Hey, that's progress! That's progress! I'm hoping that the day will come when I can look back and say, "You know, for this year, I was perfect for a few minutes." Our lives should be a perpetual living-out of the question: What is the loving thing to do? Given my circumstances right now, given my circumstances where I am and what I'm dealing with, what is the loving thing to do? And that is where it gets difficult, and that's where the Holy Spirit comes in. You're going to be hearing about

that. That's where the Spirit guides us to what the loving thing to do is. Because you see, sometimes, in one circumstance, the loving thing to do is to provide for the needs of a person in need. In the same kind of circumstance, at another time, it would not be helpful but would be enabling.

So, our lives must be a perpetual living-out of the question: Given the circumstances that I'm in at the moment, what is the loving thing to do? Love God, and love one another as Jesus loves you. It is that simple; it is that important; and it is that difficult. If you do those two things, you will fulfill everything in here (the Bible). Let's pray.

During the quiet of this moment, I want to challenge you to pray and say, "Lord, I'm not there yet, but I am going to try to get closer every single day." Would you pray that? Let's pray.

Lord, we hear Your command, and we know it. Lord, help us as we endeavor to follow it. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.