

Love Me First Then Obey

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[0 : 00] The Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things, will remind you of everything I have said to you.

Oh Jesus, we acknowledge your gift to us of your Holy Spirit, who will teach us and remind us, and be your presence among us.

I thank that this may be true for us in this service of God. We need minutes as we listen to your word. Amen and pray.

Amen. The passage that you need to look at is John 14, 15 to 24.

And you really will need, I think, to make any sense of what I'm saying, and I'm not promising that you will, but you will need this in front of you.

[1 : 07] John 14, 15 to 26. Let me just give you the setting.

This is Jesus gathered with his disciples at the Last Supper. Judith has left them. The Last Supper has been eaten and drunk, and Jesus is prepared at the end of this chapter to go out to Gethsemane, which leads to his arrest, which leads to his trial, which leads to his crucifixion.

So it's a very dramatic moment in the life of Jesus and his disciples. Kind of termination point, as he's leaving them, and he's telling them what they will have after he's gone.

Now, we are here this morning in a particular configuration, which means that there are children, and there are parents, and there are uncles, and there are aunts, and there are friends of the family, and there are godparents, and there are grandparents, and all these children are surrounded by that company of people as they come for their baptism.

Now, that company of people, we recognize now, is the company of people who may do more damage to these children than anybody else in their lives.

[2 : 53] Because when I was a child, when we got sick, the public health officer came and put a big sign on the door saying, Scarlet fever, everybody stay away.

Or mumps, or measles, or chicken pox, or something like that. Those were the kind of diseases children used to have. And I guess they still do in some measure.

But we have discovered, as it seems in this generation, or perhaps rediscovered, that the damage is not done by chicken pox and scarlet fever.

The damage is done by relationships that children develop to a father, a mother, a grandparent, a trusted family friend, a counselor, a teacher.

And those children grow up, not being able to acknowledge that they have been deeply wounded by that relationship. They have been incapacitated by that relationship.

[3 : 58] They don't know how to live their lives because of that relationship, which has wounded or crippled them very badly indeed.

And I say to you wives, you know that the one person who can hurt you more than anybody else in this world is the one you're married to.

And that goes for husbands, too. And that we have made this great discovery that in the realm of relationships, all sorts of things go wrong, and tremendous amounts of damage are done.

And there is an army of counselors and psychologists and all sorts of people in our world that are trying to deal with the woundedness of people, which stems from bad relationships.

And so these children come to be baptized. What does that mean? Well, I, you know, I'm in great danger of oversimplifying the problem, but you're all very complicated people, so you will make it complex.

[5 : 11] I'm trusting you. But look at this passage. What it begins with in verse 15, if you love me, you will obey what I command.

Now, Archbishop William Temple has written this. If you love me, you will observe those things that are my commandments.

And that's what Jesus says first to his disciples. If you love me. The relationship has got to be there before the obedience is evident.

If the relationship is not there, then the obedience will not happen. And so Jesus says the first thing that has to be there in relationship to Jesus, between him and his disciples, is that there needs to be love.

And lots of people are trying in a kind of furtive way to be obedient when they haven't got that kind of love for the Lord Jesus.

[6 : 19] And it soon fades. It doesn't last very long. And so Jesus is firm in saying, if you love me, you will obey my commandments. And the temple again says, watch that word obey.

Because it's not obey in the sense of go to church every Sunday, go to Sunday school, be confirmed, all those things. He says it's observing the things that I say to you so that your life will reflect them.

We want to reduce our religion to something we do. I'll do this and I'll do this and I'll do this. And then God will owe me. No, Jesus says, you will love me.

You will know what my will is. And you will live your life as a reflection of that. You will observe that. So he says to them, because they know that the end, the disciples know that the end has come, that this is the Last Supper.

And so he says to them, I will ask the Father and he will give you another counselor who will be with you forever. In other words, I'm going to be replaced by the counselor, the advocate.

[7 : 40] I'm going to be replaced by the one who is going to take your cold and flagging heart, take your lovelessness, take your self-interest and self-centeredness and start a flame in your heart of love for God.

That's, Jesus says, the Holy Spirit is going to do that for you. He's going to light you on fire in love for God. That's the work of the Holy Spirit.

And so he says about this spirit, this is the spirit of truth. Now, you know that we cannot, in our society, tolerate truth.

Nobody knows what to do with it. We know that we want to live by deception and we practice it all the time. The truth is too hard-edged.

It's too destructive. It does too much damage. So that in relationships, we learn very early that we don't speak the truth. We say what we know the other person wants us to say.

[9 : 00] But Jesus says, in your relationship to me, in your relationship to God, there will be the spirit of truth. Now, he says about that, that the world can't accept that.

It rejects it. And the world does reject it. Look in verse 17. Because it neither sees him or knows him, but you are in a relationship to him, for he lives with you and will be in you.

So that at the center of your life will be the reality of your relationship to God, who indwells you by his Holy Spirit, who makes Christ's presence real to you in your heart and life.

Well, Jesus assures them, I will not leave you as orphans. I won't abandon you.

I am going, but in my very going, I will come to you in a new way by the Holy Spirit. And in the course of these verses, it says three things about you and me.

[10 : 08] That God the Father will come to us, God the Holy Spirit will come to us, and Jesus Christ will abide in us as we abide in him. So he says, you're not orphans.

You are the children of God. And God abides in you. Then he goes on in verse 19 to say, before long, the world will not see me anymore.

That's the end of the historical life of Jesus Christ in time and space. But when that moment comes, I am not dead.

I will be alive. And so he says to them, because I live, you also will live. Your life is not based on the biological process.

Your life is based on the indwelling of God in your heart. That's where your life is, is in relationship to him. And he says on verse 20, look at it, on that day, you will realize the ultimate secret, the ultimate secret of Christian discipleship, which the world doesn't know and won't acknowledge because it concerns the spirit of truth and the world can't cope with that.

[11 : 28] So in verse 20, the ultimate secret is, I am in my father and you are in me and I am in you. That's who you are.

That's the basic relationship in your life. That relationship to God, the father, God, the son, and God, the Holy Spirit. That's, that's the secret.

And in verse 21, he goes on to say, whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me. He who loves me will be loved by my father and I too will love him and show myself to him.

So now he's turned it around. If you love me, you will obey me. Now he says, the sign of your love for me will be your obedience to me.

So as love is the basis of the relationship, obedience is the sign of the relationship, that you're living in obedience to Jesus Christ.

[12:37] Well, this is too much for Judas. Not Judas Iscariot in verse 22, but the other Judas says, but Lord, why do you intend to show yourself to us and not to the world?

You know, and that's the agony of Christian discipleship. We would like the whole of our world to know that we are on the victory side, that God is on our side, that Christ is his vice regent and that he is in control.

But the world doesn't know that. The world continues to despise and to reject him. And we, like Judas, say, why is this?

Why are we in this position? Why, God, don't you tell everybody that you're in charge and that we belong to you? Well, that's a natural desire for disciples who don't understand the kind of sometimes nature of the kingdom.

And Jesus had told them, sometimes the seed will grow up and flourish and sometimes it will fade away very quickly and sometimes it will grow among rocks and sometimes it will be choked up.

[13:57] So in that sense, the kingdom of God is a sometimes kingdom. It's not a vast array of people who stand fast.

It is, in a sense, a kind of a manifestation of the kingdom here and there for those who have the eyes to see it. But the world doesn't see it and doesn't acknowledge it.

And that's the nature of the kingdom to which we belong and for which we pray when we say, thy kingdom come.

Well, Jesus replies to this question and he says, anyone who loves me, he will obey my teaching. My father will love him and we will come to him and make our home with him.

So, you see, you can go downtown. Like you might go through the Safeway shopping center and buy \$100 worth of groceries and as you go out, the cashier will say to you, God loves you.

[15:07] So does Safeways. But, and she'll be right. Certainly about Safeways, but even more about God.

Because for everybody on this planet, it is true that God loves them. And it's true for everybody that God has given his son, Jesus Christ, to die on the cross for them.

There is nobody to whom this does not apply. But what Jesus is trying to show his disciples is that what Christian faith is, is reciprocity, is people responding to the love that God has shown.

While we were yet sinners, God loved us. And even though we continue on in that, God loves us. But what God wants from his disciples is that we will respond.

And in order that we will respond, it says this, the way we respond. It says, the Father will love you, he will come to you, and he'll make your home, his home, with you.

[16:28] Now this is an amazing state, that God will dwell in you. That God will dwell in us. And so, again, William Temple, with brilliant insight, says, when Jesus leaves his disciples, and he talks about it at the beginning of this chapter, he says, I go to prepare a place for you.

And that's the Christian hope. That Jesus Christ has gone before us to heaven, and he has prepared a place for us. So when we come to the end of our life, we say, let not your heart be troubled.

You believe in God, believe also in me. If it were not so, I would have told you, I go to prepare a place for you. But until that happens, that you go to that place, which is prepared for you, something powerfully dynamic needs to happen.

And what is it? We prepare a place for him in our lives. That's what that verse says.

That he will come to you, and he will make his home with you. So that you have to, that your heart has to be his home.

[17:52] You know, we love to live in our isolation from one another, don't we? To make sure that we aren't infringed upon by unwelcome guests. But God the Father comes in Christ by the Spirit to

dwell in us.

And so you have a permanent guest in your house. One that's not going to leave. So you better come to terms with that guest.

Now, you can reject the guest. And that's spoken of in the next verse, in verse 24, when he says, he who does not love me will not obey my teaching. We can reject God from taking, making his dwelling place in us.

We can do that very easy. And some of us might feel embarrassed to have such a guest in our house. We wouldn't want our friends to know about it. But, we're told that as the disciples of Jesus, that God loves us and we reciprocate that love by making our hearts his home, his dwelling place. We prepare in our hearts a place for him as he prepares a place for us. Well, then you go on. Jesus says in verse 25, All this I have spoken while still with you, heading for the cross.

[19 : 27] And you'll notice at the end of the chapter, he says in those dramatic words, Rise, let us go hence. So that moment is coming closer and closer.

And Jesus says, I've told you all this, still being present with you. But, God, and he goes on in verse 26, The Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.

so that, what happens, you see, for us, is we take Jesus' teaching.

Remember it says, If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And his commandments are in the Gospels. And the Holy Spirit recreates just as Jesus met with his disciples on the shores of the Sea of Galilee.

so by the Holy Spirit, we are brought to that place where we meet with Jesus, where we welcome him into our home, where we love him and that love finds expression in our obedience to him.

[20 : 48] And we establish that relationship with him and we invite him into our hearts as he has invited us into his. And that's the way we live our lives.

So that at the heart of your life and mine, there is a totally good relationship, a healing relationship, a renewing relationship, a loving relationship.

That's to be at the heart of our lives. So that when other relationships break down, we have still a relationship which can bring us healing.

We still have a relationship where we can find forgiveness. We still have a relationship which can demonstrate love. That's the relationship that's to be at the center of our lives.

And in that relationship, we find the healing which overflows into the other relationships in our lives. You know, you get it all the time.

[21 : 59] I mean, the Globe and Mail pointed out last week that most people quit their jobs because of their relationships within the company. They can't handle it. Families break down because relationships don't work.

Children are traumatized and wounded for life because of bad relationships. relationships. What we're doing when we bring children to be baptized is to establish a good relationship.

A loving, God-giving and forgiving relationship. And that relationship is marked by the spirit of truth who is the counselor.

and that relationship is a permanent relationship that God abides in us as we abide in him. And that Holy Spirit teaches us as Jesus teaches us.

He makes the teachings of Jesus real to us in the circumstances of our lives. And he brings to our memory all those things which are part of that ongoing relationship.

[23 : 17] And so it's desperately important that at the base of all our lives should be this relationship not just one in which God loves you but in which the whole of your life is an attempt to reciprocate that love with which God has loved you.

And that's how we pray for the children who've been baptized this morning. We have claimed the promise of God's love for them and now they're to be taught to reciprocate to give back that love to enter into the fullness of that relationship with God through Christ by the Holy Spirit in the company of the community of the Holy Spirit.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. There is a promise in the Old Testament that the Spirit of God will create in us a new heart not a heart of stone but a heart of flesh a real new heart and this song is about a heart it's hymn 476 476 important gives God nothing does need to quiet he can act with ease and don't your heart and dance while at cl prints and time and let the time and Oh, how I could praise my God, how I could no sin send me.

How I could not only be as I come, so praise Him for me.

How I could not only be as I come, so praise Him for me.

[25 : 59] How I could not only be as I come, so praise Him for me. How I could not only be as I come, so praise Him for me. How I could not only be as I come, so praise Him for me.

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[27 : 18] How I could not only be as I come, so praise Him for me. How I could not only be as I come, so praise Him for me. How I could not only be as I come, my mercy of my sins, Amen.

Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Father, for our salvation, your love for all the world is in Christ.

May all we offer you this day, may you our dedication to you. May your love for you. May Jesus Christ be with you.

Let us pray. Let us pray. Gather together in the name and power of our risen Lord, through whom the glory of God is revealed, let us offer our prayers to God.

[29 : 28] Lord, we give thanks for the many ways in which you reveal your love to us from day to day. We thank you for the relationship we can have with you through your Son.

We ask that you would help this relationship to strengthen the way we relate to those around us, to our families, to our friends, to our community.

We ask that you would free our spirits from restlessness and anxiety. Give us that peace and power which flow from you.

Show us, O Lord, the peace we should seek, the peace we must give, the peace we can keep, the peace you have given us in Jesus our Lord.

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer. We pray for the leaders of this nation and all the nations of the world. We remember especially the peoples of Bosnia, the Philippines, South Africa, and the former Yugoslavia.

[30 : 37] We pray that all those who lead may renounce violence and aggression and seek reconciliation. Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer. We pray that your church throughout the world and in this congregation may be united in peace and harmony.

We pray especially for the children's mission upcoming at St. Chad's. We ask that you turn to your Book of Common Prayer on page 47, and we'll pray together prayer number 18.

Together, Almighty God, who has committed to thy holy church the care and nurture of thy children, enlighten with thy wisdom those who teach and those who learn, that rejoicing in the knowledge of thy truth, they may worship thee and serve thee all the days of their life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Lord, we remember all those who mourn the loss of loved ones, especially Maureen and Merv and their family, and the family of all those in Pictou County, Nova Scotia.

Comfort them with your presence and uphold them in your strength. We also remember all those in this congregation who are anxious, lonely, sad, or sick.

[32 : 30] We remember especially Ben Thomas and bring him to you this morning. Let us remember others known to us in silence.

Amen. Lord, uphold these, your servants, with your power and strength.

Teach us how to come alongside them in their need to show true compassion in a practical way.

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Lord, enliven the church with your spirit through us give your loving spirit to a world in need of comfort. Make our many gifts one offering for the world.

Let us in closing pray together the prayer for unity on page 40 in our book of common prayer. We will pray the prayer midway down the page.

[33 : 47] O God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, our only Savior, the Prince of Peace, give us grace seriously to lay to heart the great dangers we are in by our unhappy divisions.

Take away all enmity and prejudice and whatsoever else may hinder us from godly union and concord that as there is but one body and one spirit and one hope of our calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all, so we may henceforth be all of one heart and of one soul united in one holy bond of truth and peace, of faith and charity, and may with one mind and one mouth glorify thee through Jesus Christ, our Lord.
Amen.