

True love requires sacrifice

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[0 : 0 0] have your Bibles in front of you. Turn again to John 14, beginning at verse 15. As you do that, let me remind you what you heard last time. So last time we saw that it is tempting to think that the disciples of Jesus always had Jesus with them. I mean, that is tempting to think, isn't it? Their Christian life would be easier than their Christian life because they have the physical presence of Jesus with them. The reality is, is that they had the physical presence of Jesus with them for about three and a half years. The rest of their life they lived without the physical presence of Jesus, and so their Christian life had to be lived in exactly the same way that we have to live our Christian life. And that's important for a couple of reasons, because the promise that God makes here is that he doesn't leave any of his children alone.

But it sure seems like it if Jesus isn't around anymore, right? You know, if the physical presence of Jesus isn't there, isn't God shortchanging us by only giving us God the Spirit and the Helper? And this is a lesson that Thomas the doubter, you shouldn't really call him Thomas because he was a doubter for a while, and then he came around to not doubt in Christ, in the resurrection of Christ. But it is interesting that upon Thomas' confession, the next thing that John has to say, the next thing that John has to say is something so amazing that you, it's said in about a couple of verses, and you really, we're going to get to it in good time. But he basically says this, that to believe the Word of God is the equivalent to put your finger in the hole of Jesus' hand. To believe the Word of God produces in you the same type of experience, if you truly believe the Word of God, as it would for you to do the very thing that Thomas did, which were to check the holes in the hands of Jesus with his finger and the hole in the side of his body. So this idea that somehow Christianity was richer or fuller in the days of physical Jesus, according to John, isn't actually the case. God promises the same spiritual reality and experience through conviction and through commitment that you can have if you walked on earth with Jesus. So what we learn here is that as we follow Jesus today, we have to do it almost in exactly the same ways that they had to follow Jesus then. I'd be tempted to say that following Jesus in this country that used to be Christian, it used to be Christian probably about 150 years ago, perhaps, and in England maybe a couple of hundred years you can add onto that. We've lived in the afterglow of Christianity and, you know, one report says that I saw on the TV not so long ago, what makes you a Christian? And somebody says, well, born in England, right? What really upset me was the fact that there was no correction, that people just... So Christianity, Christianity, as what it really is, has lost, has not only lost its afterglow, but it's lost its true message. And the message here is dead simple, that if you belong to Jesus, okay, God does not leave you alone in this world, okay? You're not alone. You have the presence of God with you all the time, not just in the world in which he controls, but in your very heart, God takes up his residence. Now, this is extremely difficult to get across because I can remember taking my children to the park one day and they were asking, when we go to the park, will God be there? And I had to point out, well, God is everywhere. And then when you explain to them that God is also in your heart, if you believe, how did he get there? Now, you can understand that the conversation has just gone from what seems to be fairly simple, now to incredibly difficult. So I'm going to put it dead simple for us. The reason [4 : 2 1] God can dwell in your life is because God can do anything, okay? That may not be very satisfactory, but God, who can do anything by definition, is able to make his residence in your life. And when you have it, you know it, okay? Let me say that again. When you have it, you know it. God takes up his residence in those who belong to Jesus. Now, Jesus here is on his way to the Father, but he's on his way to the Father via the cross. And here we have the second most important lesson, or it's another important lesson. It just comes second in the passage, and that is you don't get to go through this life as a believer, or even as an unbeliever, without making sacrifices. Now, you can get to choose what your sacrifice will be, but you don't get not to make

one. And we will see why that is so incredibly important in a minute. We've had a dedication this morning, and anybody knows who's got children will know that children require sacrifice from you all the time. You have to die all the time to your children, okay? What they demand, what they need, what they want, means that you are being sacrificed on the altar of your family constantly. And why do you do it? Well, you do it because you love them, right? We're going to move into that, and we're going to see why Jesus finishes with that, because

Jesus wants us to see the cross from a whole new angle. If we see the cross as God demonstrating his love to us, by the time Jesus finishes with us here this morning, he's going to get to see it from a whole new angle. So he's reminding his disciples that he is going back to the Father via the cross, but they will not be left alone. God does not leave anyone alone who belongs to him. So here's a summary of what Jesus is saying. Those who belong to Jesus have the Holy Spirit. Jesus is not prescribing here, he's describing. And the difference between a description and a prescription is what you get when you go to the doctor. So you go to the doctors, and the doctor says, tell me how you feel. And immediately you begin to describe. And the doctor says, right, I know what that is. And then he writes a prescription.

Okay? You describe, and then the doctor prescribes. This is what you have, and now this is what I'm giving you because of what you have. Now the trouble is, is that when Christians read the Bible, believe it or not, they get those two, which I think are fairly simple to understand, mixed up. So we read descriptions as prescriptions. We read the things that Jesus is explaining as things to do. And they're not things to do. They're things that are. And that's a big, big difference. So let me just state this clearly. Jesus is describing what a true believer is, and a true believer keeps the commandments of God. Okay? You don't become a true believer by keeping the commandments. It's not a prescription.

It is a description. True believers keep the commandments of God. That's what they look like. True believers also have God the Holy Spirit. They didn't get him by doing five steps to holiness.

They got him because he was given to them because they are believers. Jesus then moves on to say that the peace that he gives cannot be found in the world, and the peace that he gives is not like the peace that the world gives. And there's an important distinction there. Jesus is not saying you can't find peace in the world. You know, I think Robertson Crusoe had peace for a period of time. Okay?

[8 : 12] Everybody, even Jeremiah, wanted a second house in the country. And even David said, all for the wings of a dove. And even your pastor has said from time to time, Lord, get me out of here and do it quickly. Okay? We all love escapism. Some people read fiction, and some people have more holidays than they should. Okay? Because they can't cope. They can't cope with real life. Real life is torturous, and we tend to forget it. See, when a person writes a fictional story, they are determined what the story will be. The thing is, you can step out of that fiction, you get back to real life. The trouble is with real life, it tortures and it slays. Okay? That there's no escape from it. And so the only way some people try to escape from it is by jumping into a fictional world that's not like their own. What Jesus is saying here is, look, I understand the world that you're going to live in, but you're not going to be left alone in it. And the peace that I give in this world that will torture and slay is a peace that cannot be found in the world. You know when you have that peace, and you know that you have that peace at times, when you think, how on earth did I get through this?

Well, the answer is fairly simple. God got you through it. Okay? If you're thinking, how am I going to get through that tomorrow? You shouldn't be thinking about that. Jesus says, don't worry about tomorrow. Why? Well, one, he's already got it in hand. But two, more importantly, you're always going to be left with a conclusion of, I'm not going to be able to get through it. Okay? But God's grace is sufficient each day and every day, so is his strength and his mercies anew every morning. You are trying to work out how you're going to get through the future based on today's mercies, not based on the mercies that you'll receive in the future. Okay? So if you're sat here thinking, I've got all this coming to me over the next couple of years, what am I going to do? Don't worry. And here's the reason you shouldn't worry, is because the grace that you have today is for today. It's not for two years down the line.

The mercies that you have today are for today. They're not for two years down the line. The mercies and grace that you need two years down the line, when everything starts falling apart or pressures become greater, then so will the grace become greater. And so will God's mercy become greater.

God is able to take care of your needs, but he doesn't give you tomorrow's lot today. He gives you tomorrow's lot tomorrow. Okay? The first sin, let's remember the first sin was committed by someone who was grabbing for what they could have ahead of time. That was the problem. Okay? That's the sin of all. We all want what we think we should have, but we all want it ahead of time. That's where everything goes wrong. So God gives peace, not like the world gives, because each and every day, God's grace and mercy is be able to triumph over whatever it is you're facing. God does not leave true, genuine believers alone to the point where they feel they can't cope. You may feel you can't cope, but I can guarantee if you're the Lord, you will get through it. Okay? You will always get through it because God keeps his promises. Okay? And I believe God keeps his promises. Jesus then moves on to verse 31, where he takes all of your views about the cross and then tips them on his head or tips them on their head.

But his basic assumption or his basic teaching is this, that those who love me obey me. That those who love me obey me, and Jesus demonstrates his love for the Father by obeying the Father. Jesus then sets this as an example, but the example is problematic because Jesus is the perfect obeyer and I am the imperfect obeyer. And so the kind of grace and peace I need to get through, okay, is going to be more burdensome on God, not that God is ever burdened, than Jesus. Jesus can obey perfectly and I can't.

[12:16] Jesus obeys perfectly for you because you can't. Okay? We tend to focus entirely on the death of Christ. But you need to ask yourself the question, why did Jesus live the perfect life?

Why did Jesus have to live a perfect life? Well, because the problems that are caused are caused in life, not in death. Okay? The problems you have when it comes between you and God in thoughts, words, and deeds, are life problems. They're not death problems. When you're dead, you're dead.

But the problems you have, the sins you commit, you commit in life. And so the reason Jesus lived a perfect life is because you don't. The reason Jesus lives a perfect life is because I don't. And the reason Jesus lives a perfect life is because he lives it on our behalf. He doesn't just die on our behalf to forgive us and make us right with God. He lives on our behalf. Okay? This is why I'm able to stand before God and be perfect in his sight. Because God looks at the life of his son, who is perfect, not mine. He sees me in Jesus because that's where I belong. That doesn't give me a right to therefore go and sin. What it means is I should be thankful that my sins are always forgiven in Christ Jesus.

So, verse 15, Jesus explains. Jesus is demonstrating here that a person who keeps the commandments of God is the person who loves God. It's that simple. If you love me, you will keep my commandments.

We can exchange love for any other, trust, belief, love encapsulates it all. That if you love Jesus, you will obey Jesus. And what this means is that salvation, in terms of true love, in fact, even true love in this world, cannot be found in words alone. Okay? You ever gone into a card shop and you read what's on the inside of the card and you want those words to convey it to another and you think they're just not good enough? You recognize automatically that words cannot convey always love. That you can say loving things, but that loving thing that you said with your mouth can be undone by your hand a few minutes later. Right? So, we understand that words aren't enough. We also understand that gifts aren't enough. You know, you've got the old picture of the man buying his wife flowers. Why is he buying his wife flowers? Not that I've got anything against buying a wife flowers.

[15:00] What I'm indicating is that that's not a demonstration of love. It is a gift, but it's not a demonstration of love. It may be in part a demonstration of love to something deeper, but the flowers itself isn't.

The only way you can demonstrate love is in the same way a parent does with a child and a husband does with a wife and a wife does with a husband and this therefore applies to God as well because God sets the standard is sacrificial love. That's the only type of love that God is speaking about here.

When you don't put yourself first, but you put the other person first first. Okay? That's the love that Jesus is speaking of here. So, if you love me, okay, in other words, let's substitute the language. If you put me first in all things, then you will keep my commandments. If you love me first, then it's not going to be a burden to you to do these things for me because your whole life is dictated or modified, motivated by your love for me. Love here is the supreme motivator. And so, if you don't

know which it is, which is the greatest form of love, it's not words, it's not gifts, it is you giving yourself.

If it's the gift of you sacrificially, then that gift counts. But any other type of gifts like flowers that die in a couple of days or weeks, if you order them, the problem that you have is that all of those things perish, even we perish, but sacrificial love endures. This is the lesson that Jesus is teaching us here. We read in Scripture that greater love has no man than this, than that he lays down his life for his friends. Okay? Now, you imagine that. You think, yeah, I'd do it. But you imagine laying your life down for your friends. You imagine laying your life down for your friends when you have a wife and children, you have everything else. Well, Jesus lays his life down, and guess what? You're not his friends. He loves you, but you don't love him. Jesus Christ lays his life down for his enemies.

[17:12] Okay? We stick our fingers up to God, we turn our back on him, we walk away from him all the time, and Jesus is saying, I'm going to lay my life down for you. The sacrifice that Jesus does is that sacrificial demonstration of love, where the only reason he does what he does is because he has the father's will at mind, and the father loves you. Not because you're necessarily lovable, but this is because love is not speaking about a quality in you, it's speaking about a quality in the person who's doing it. So God loves you, okay, in action. Okay? I've said this before, and it's worth saying again. Husbands, you're not very good at this, and so I'm going to be a little bit hard on you, graciously hard, and that if your wife asks you, why do you love her? Okay? You better not say anything for at least a day. You need to think about it really, really hard, and here's why.

Because if you say, you know, I love you because your hair looks nice, what happens when it doesn't? Okay? If I love you because you're this dress size, or you do this, or you do that, all these temporal reasons for love, when they're not there, your wife is clever enough to figure out that if they're not there, then your love for them cannot be there. So if you're, men, if you're describing love like that, because we're not naturally good at it, okay, you need to realize that type of love needs to be ditched immediately. Sacrificial love that we mentioned, as we mentioned in the dedication this morning, is a love that puts the other person first. Okay? Is it difficult? Yeah, it's difficult, but like I said, nobody gets to go through this life, nobody, if you're going to be a loving person without making sacrifices. You can get to choose what those sacrifices will be, but you don't get not to make them. And that's the challenge that Jesus is laying down here. If you love me, you will keep my commandments, which means you will not be doing other things. They will have to disappear. Jesus restates this in verse 21, that whoever keeps his commandments loves him. So he says it one way in verse 15, he then says the same thing a different way in verse 21. He then says in verse 23, if anyone loves me, he will keep my word and my father will love him. So what Jesus is saying here is that the person who loves Jesus is demonstrated in the life that keeps God's word. That's how I demonstrate love. I can't tell

God I love him and God be convinced, okay? I cannot even give God a gift to convince him that I love him. I can't do any of that. And God go, yeah, you really pulled the wool over me, over my eyes this time, Daniel. I really thought God isn't going to be fooled by any of that. God knows that the way we love him is to love him properly. And that is to listen. How many times have I said in the seven years that I've been here that listening is more important than anything else? Much more important than anything you take the child who breaks the glass of milk when the child is told not to touch the glass of milk, okay? You know that the reason the child did it is because she didn't listen. And if you come into the room, the child will naturally think you're going to be upset about the glass of milk. And you might be, but you shouldn't be. The thing you should be really upset about is the fact that they didn't listen. And God understands that all problems occur, all sin multiplies in the life that doesn't listen. So if you love God, you will listen, love, and obey. All of his word. All of his word. Verse 16, then, is where Jesus makes the transition. Verse 16 follows verse 15, and that's not a surprise, but it is a surprise because of what Jesus says. Notice how they run together. If you love me, you will keep my commandments. Verse 14, and, notice the and, I will ask the Father and he will give you another helper who will be with you forever. Now, a little English lesson here. The word and is a conjunction which tells us that what Jesus has just said has something to do with what Jesus is about to say, okay? In other words, they go together. So this is what Jesus is saying, that the person who loves Jesus is the person who keeps the commands of Jesus. And the person who loves Jesus and keeps the commands of Jesus is the person who receives the Holy Spirit, is the person who has the Holy Spirit in their life. Now, this isn't five steps to the Holy Spirit. Jesus is describing here. He's not prescribing. He's not telling us what we must do in order to get the Holy

Spirit. Rather, he is describing the type of person whom the Holy Spirit is given to, okay? The Holy Spirit is given to those who belong.

In fact, you belong by God giving you his Holy Spirit. The moment that that happens is so minute in time, you might want to argue the particulars of which comes first, but that's not the issue.

[22 : 31] The issue here is that the person who's not alone in this world has God's Spirit in them. And the way that they look is that they love and obey Jesus. So the person who has the Holy Spirit is the person who loves and obeys Jesus. Jesus is not laying down conditions for receiving the Holy Spirit.

Rather, he's describing what belongs together. And what belongs together is love for God, keeping his commandments, and the Holy Spirit. There's no rub.

They jowl together perfectly. Jesus says the person who loves him is the person who follows him, keeps his commandments. Secondly, he says that the person who follows him, follows him because he has God the Spirit in him. In other words, these two belong together, okay? I can't obey God without God in my life causing me to obey God, okay? That's a description. It's not a prescription. And I can't try and go out of this door and try and keep all ten commandments in order to get something from God.

It doesn't work like that. What Jesus is saying here is that the person who is saved and the way to be saved is to repent and believe in Christ. That's how you get saved, to repent and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. But the saved person, when you are saved, is the person who loves, keeps the commandments, or loves by keeping the commandments, demonstrating that love, and who has the Holy Spirit. What Jesus is saying here is that if you're a Christian, you're a Christian to the core. It goes all the way down.

In other words, keeping God's commandments is simply the external version of what is true in your heart. It is simply the overflow of what you know to be true deep within you. Now, the trouble is, is that, and I see this all the time in Christianity, I even see it in my own life, so don't take it as a criticism, just an observation, is that what happens is that as people lose the purpose of their Christian life, they then to pick and choose what they obey and what they don't obey. And then pastors end up being treated as like end-of-life care, rather than what they should be as this life care. Okay? I'm not here simply to bury you. Okay? I'm not here to simply just to take your funeral service. I'm to make sure that you're in the right, proper condition to meet God when that happens. Okay? My responsibility that I have, if I could not have it, I would be, I would be a much more, not, I was going to say less weighty man, but you might think I was referring to my weight or something, but I'd be a less burdensome man.

[25 : 23] The fact that I have all these people before me now that I have to present to God, right, terrifies me. Terrifies me. And the fact that I've got all those children out there, you think, well, you're taking it a bit personally. They're not yours, they're ours. Yeah, I understand that.

But the Christian community means that we're in it together, right? You look after me, I look after you. You keep me straight, and I keep you straight. That's the blessing we have in the community that Jesus is describing here. So, the overflow of a life that loves Jesus is the overflow that looks like obeying him and listening to him. Now, this is where we wrap it up. We start drawing it to a close now.

So, pay attention to the idea of sacrifice at the last verse, verse 31. This is not just an example of Jesus, or rather, this is not just an example that Jesus gives, but this is Jesus showing us a different view of the cross all together. Now, most of us will sit here in this room and imagine that the cross is saying something to the world, something like this, that the cross is a demonstration of God's love for us. And that's not untrue. In fact, that is very true. The cross of Christ is a demonstration of just how much God loves you. We've already said that. What Jesus does here is he gets you to see it from a whole new angle. Listen to the verse.

What you are meant to see when you look at the cross of Christ is the Son loving the Father. And what you are meant to see about love is that all true love involves sacrifice. Okay? When we look at the cross, we should see Jesus demonstrating his love to the Father to us.

[27 : 25] And the way that he is doing that is by following God the Father to the cross, his will to the cross. And what that means is this, that all true love involves sacrifice. Now, let me just spell this out.

You don't get to not make a sacrifice, whether you're a believer or an unbeliever. You will always have to make them. But let me put it this way. As a believer and or a non-believer, this is what you

need to understand. The sacrifices you make determine or at least demonstrate what you love. Okay? In the same way Jesus is, through sacrifices, demonstrating who he loves, he not only loves the Father, but he loves the Father's will that loves you so that you may be saved. He loves all of that.

But the lesson here is that all true love manifests itself in sacrifice, and what you sacrifice your life for demonstrates what you love the most. We make sacrifices all the time. You take the young girl who's learning piano instead of going out and playing with her friends in the park. She sacrifices, okay, on a very low scale, simple view. Her friendships, you know, or the idea of being able to play in the park for a couple of hours. She sacrifices that because she wants to play piano. Now, she may get to play with her friends at another time in the week, but you understand the principle. In order for us to grow in one area, something else has to go. Now, when you bring this down into relationship with God, the same thing applies. Okay? The Christian life is a sacrificial life. This is why Jesus says, deny yourself, take up your cross. Basically, die. Die to yourself. Die to yourself. And any true love between individuals in the church is going to be exactly the same thing. If you truly love your wife, your wife will cause you to die. And if you truly love your husband, the same thing will apply. It'll cause death. But same with the children, you truly love your children in sacrificial ways, they'll require death from you. Death to yourself. That's not physical death. That is death to your will, to your ways, to your desires, in order that your love for them may be seen in making them maybe even greater than you. Okay? What Jesus is demonstrating here is that you don't get to not make a sacrifice. You do get to choose which one it'll be, and Jesus had that choice. In the Garden of Gethsemane, he, in absolute pain and turmoil, he said, let this cup pass from me. And then he said, but not as my will. But not my will be done.

Your will be done. Okay? Jesus demonstrates here from a human point of view that we can choose what our sacrifice will be. Jesus chose God's will. And it's the same in any relationship in this church, or any relationship in the world. The world functions on what people are willing to sacrifice. [30 : 29] And the world gets messed up because of what people are unwilling to sacrifice. That's how the world operates. And that's why the world is not necessarily a loving place. So here's the considerations as we close. When Jesus obeys, he obeys perfectly. But when we obey, we obey imperfectly. And God understands this.

God understands that we obey imperfectly. Jesus does not, however, lower the standard of love. He doesn't say obey in your own way, because if he did, that would lower the standard of love, and that would lower the standard of sacrifice. No, the standards are high. They're God's standards. God is gracious when we don't meet them, but he will not lower them, because to lower them would mean to lower the blessing and the truth of what love is. So remember, those who love Jesus obey him. Those who love Jesus follow him. Those who love Jesus have God the Holy Spirit with him. And those who love Jesus will never, ever, ever be left alone in this world. Amen.