

HOW TO LOVE JESUS

John 14:15-21 Text: vs. 15 *"If you love me, keep my commands."*

This fourteenth chapter of John is the greatest chapter of *comfort* in the Bible. God is moving toward the day He will put His Son Jesus upon a throne, and it will become God's Kingdom here on Earth! We've heard the past two Sundays there is only one way to get to heaven. And it's through Jesus! He made that clear, leaving no room for doubt when He said, *"I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father, but by Me."*

Now, as He continued to teach His disciples He said, *"If you love Me, keep My commandments."* The word *"commandments"* Jesus used here doesn't mean the *Ten Commandments*. It means, if you love Jesus, your love for Him will be shown by keeping His teachings. But you know, obedience is difficult. Sometimes, when it comes to obedience, we're like little children.

A church member once said to his Pastor while they were sitting before a fireplace talking, *"I can worship God just as easily out on my boat as I can in a church pew."* The embers in the fire before them were glowing cheerfully. Silently, the minister walked over to the fireplace, took the tongs, lifted one hot glowing coal from the fire and placed it out on the hearth all by itself, then turned and walked back to his seat. As the two men watched, it didn't take long for the hot glowing coal to start cooling and then become nothing but a blackened ash. The man neglecting church looked over to the Pastor and said, *"You don't need to say another word. I understand what that means. I can't worship alone. I'll be in my pew next Sunday."*

Hebrews 10:24-26 says, *"Let us not stay away from church meetings. Some people are doing this all the time."* One afternoon, the Wisconsin Badgers football team was being badly beaten by the Michigan State Spartans. The Wisconsin fans were cheering their heads off, which caused the Michigan fans to wonder how they could be cheering when their team was losing. But what those Michigan fans didn't know was, most of the Wisconsin fans were watching the Milwaukee Brewers beating the St. Louis Cardinals in the World Series - on their cell phones! They were looking beyond what was happening on the field in front of them. They were looking for what was going on in a better place.

And we need to do the same. We need to *"fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith."* (Heb. 12:1,2) In verse fifteen today, Jesus said, *"If you love Me, you will keep my commandments,"* Now, loving Jesus, and keeping His commandments amount to the same thing. *"Love"* is attitude. *"Keep"* is action. And the action used here is called *"commandments."* It's done out of obedience.

In John's Gospel, Jesus had but one *"commandment"*: *"love one another."* And when it's used in the plural, it means all those actions which flow from an attitude of love. But since God and Jesus are One, they have no real "needs" except to be worshipped. However, when a Christian acts in the best interests of others, *that* meets God's needs! And keeping Jesus' commandments is the how God's love becomes visible. The *"commandments"* of Jesus involve a whole way of life. A life of loving Jesus!

Remember, Jesus spent His last night before His crucifixion in the Upper Room with His disciples and had already told them He's going away. He said the time was coming when He wouldn't be with them anymore. So, if Jesus was leaving, they wondered where did that leave them? He told them, *"Don't let your hearts be troubled. Trust me. And keep my commandments!"*

Well, look around you here today. You see a lot of empty seats. Should we be discouraged by this? Should we think since we are few in number, there isn't much we can do? Do we think we're outnumbered, shorthanded, and outmatched for our calling? Remember, God doesn't need much to accomplish much. We may feel only a few really care about this church. But remember, there are millions of people who still believe as we do. Yes, this church may have lost some members who have moved away or died. We may not be growing as fast as we would like. But we're not the only church like this. We're not alone. And we *won't* be defeated! We may not have the numbers filling up this sanctuary like we did before the pandemic and two hurricanes ago. Remember, we had chairs in the aisles. Sometimes there was standing room only. But we're still strong in our faith today! We're still strong in our belief in the Lord. Remember, Christ promised that the Gates of Hell will not prevail over you.

Paul sat in prison and encouraged Timothy to press on. Keep working for the Lord, he said. And remember, effectiveness is not measured by the number of people preached to or converted. It's not measured by the number of hours spent doing church work. You're called to be faithful! Your job here at ECC is to be a witness for God right here in our community and around the world through our Missions Programs.

Let me give you a few examples. Back in January, the Missions Committee reassigned \$2,400.00 to the Oasis After School Program in Baja, Mexico. In April we received \$4,600.00 in donations for Baja. Last Sunday we received an anonymous donation of \$2,500.00 for Baja Missions, which together made a total of \$9,500.00 for Baja. It's the most we have

ever been able to send to this worthy mission in Baja, Mexico. The check has been mailed to Monte Collins, son of Mike and Wanda, who will follow through on its use. To God be the glory for this wonderful response! And our local Wednesday Food Distribution program, led so capably by Connie Barker and her team, receives, sorts, prepares, and hands out food parcels to over 120 families every week through the door to Jenkins Fellowship Hall. Soon, we will focus our mission to the Abused Women and Children of Collier County coming up in July. Our December Christmas mission program is for *Operation Christmas Child* which demonstrates God's love, in a real way to children in need around the world and is sponsored by Samaritan's Purse which partners with local churches worldwide to share the Good News of Jesus Christ and make disciples of the nations.

When we do this, we can leave the rest up to God. He causes the rain to fall. He sends His Holy Spirit to inspire. We can't make people faithful. We can't make their decisions. People must make their own choices. Remember Jesus said, *"I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father, but by Me."* And He continued, *"If you love Me, keep My commandments."*

In chapter 6 of the book of Judges, Gideon was called to save the people of Israel and lead them against the Midianites. Israel had done *"evil in the sight of the Lord, and the Lord gave them into the hand of Midian."* The Midianites took all the Jews' crops and gave them grief and heartache. When the Israelites realized the error of their ways, they cried out to the Lord for help, and a prophet was sent to deliver them just as He had rescued them from Egypt. Enter Gideon. He was hiding from the Midianites when an angel spoke to him and called him a mighty man of courage. The angel told him God was sending him to *"save Israel from the hand of Midian."* At first, Gideon didn't think he could do it. But after he was encouraged that God would be with him in his mission, God told Gideon to destroy the Altar the Israelites had built to worship Baal, which was evidence of their sin. During the night, Gideon took ten of his men and tore down the Altar of Baal, which made the people very angry. They asked for the death of that *altar destroyer* Gideon. Joash, Gideon's father, told them if Baal really was a god, he would kill Gideon himself. It didn't happen. And that's what saved his son.

So, still wanting assurance from the Lord, Gideon asked for proof of his calling. He put the woolly covering of a sheep, or goat called fleece, out on the ground for two tests. First, Gideon asked God to have dew collect *only on the fleece*, not on the ground. In the second test, Gideon asked for *the fleece to be dry*, and the ground to be covered with dew. It happened just that way! Then Gideon gathered 32,000 Israelites to fight the Midianite army of 135,000 men. However, the Lord commanded Gideon to reduce his army down to only three hundred men. *"So, Gideon took the men down to the water. There the LORD told him, "Separate those who lap the water with their tongues as a dog laps, from those who kneel down to drink." Three hundred of them drank from cupped hands, lapping like dogs. All the rest got down on their knees to drink. The LORD said to Gideon, "With the three hundred men that lapped, I will save you and give the Midianites into your hands. Let all the others go home."* (Judges 7:5-7)

Then, Gideon took his small army and surrounded the Midianite camp at night. On a signal, they smashed jars, blew trumpets, and shouted, *"For the Lord, and for Gideon!"*. Torches were put all around. The Midianites became totally confused by the noise and the lights. In their confusion, they began to fight and kill each other. And as they fled, Gideon ordered the Israelites to attack and destroy the Midianites. Since Gideon did things God's way, his small army won a seemingly impossible battle. It was a triumphant victory for Gideon, the Israelites, and God. We should all listen to that.

Our fleece, as it were, was put out in Everglades City in 1926. The sign given then was that a ministry should be here in this city. And the sign remains, today - *continue your 96-year ministry, here*. And it will continue, by following Jesus' command. *"If you love me, keep my commands."* Yes, we *are* like Gideon. Our numbers have been reduced, but we shall win! Let us not fear. God is with us. God was with Gideon. God is with us. And we shall be victorious! That is how to love Jesus! AMEN