

“THE CHALLENGE - LOVE JESUS”
Acts 16:9-15, Revelation 21:10, 22-22:5, John 14:15-29
May 21 & 22, 2022

Pastor Robert Morgan shares an interesting situation and relates it to our lives. He says, “My daughter Hannah and I had a Great Dane named Samson that we dearly loved. Samson, as it turns out, was well named, for he was big and strong and muscular - and, like his namesake, he also had a penchant for wandering. We built fences, we tried chains and dog runs, we tried everything to keep Samson at home. But he’d dig under the fence or climb over it, and it drove us to distraction.

“So we bought the best-selling book on the market on the subject of training dogs. *No Bad Dogs* was written by the famous British dog trainer Barbara Woodhouse, who raised Great Danes herself. One night when I went upstairs to tuck in Hannah, she had a sad expression on her face, and she said, ‘Dad, I know now what Samson’s real problem is. Let me read you this paragraph from *No Bad Dogs*.

She read: “*In a dog’s mind, a master or a mistress to love, honor, and obey is an absolute necessity. The love is dormant in the dog until brought into full bloom by an understanding owner. Thousands of dogs appear to love their owners, they welcome them home with enthusiastic wagging of the tail and jumping up, they follow them about their houses happily and, to the normal person seeing the dog, the affection is true and deep. But to the experienced dog trainer this outward show is not enough. The true test of real love takes place when the dog has got the opportunity to go out on its own as soon as the door is left open by mistake and it goes off and often doesn’t return home for hours. That dog loves only its home comforts and the attention it gets from its family; it doesn’t truly love the master or mistress as they fondly think. True love in dogs is apparent when a door is left open and the dog still stays happily within earshot of its owner. For the owner must be the be-all and end-all of a dog’s life.*

[And what about for us?] “**The real test of our Christianity isn’t seen in our work or activity,** or even in our theological purity. It’s found in this: when we have an opportunity to wander away, to disobey, to leave His presence, do we choose instead to stay close to Him, to abide in Christ, to obey?¹

¹ (Robert J. Morgan, *Stories, Illustrations & Quotes*, [Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2000] pg. 589)

You see **our love for Jesus is not only expressed in what we say we believe, but how we live our life on a daily basis.** Are we going to obey the commands and teaching of Jesus, even when no one is looking? Or will we sneak away and do our own thing when we have the chance, thinking no one will ever see or know? Loving Jesus means that we follow His will and His way ALWAYS!

And then, we have to ask ourselves, ‘Is Jesus my all in all? Is He the Master of my life?’ Are we Christians In Name Only (CINO), coming home to Jesus to find our creature comforts only in times of need when the world can no longer help us, or when the bottom has dropped out of our life? Do we let Jesus guide our daily lives as we conform to His teachings? Or do we do just enough to get by with being called a Christian, but disregard all the tough things Jesus calls us to do? Do we run in the ways of the world, and when all our bridges are burned, all our resources drained and have nowhere else to turn, come running to the church to meet our needs? That’s not what Christianity is all about, but sadly it’s how many who call themselves Christians deal with Jesus. They enjoy the comfort and attention from the church, but Jesus is not their all in all. They are simply users of the church’s resources to get what they want.

We heard about some of Paul’s travels in Acts 16 today. (Show map of Paul’s journeys) In the few verses before our lesson of Acts 16:9-15, we see that *“Paul and his companions traveled throughout the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been kept by the Holy Spirit from preaching the Word in the province of Asia. When they came to the border of Mysia, they tried to enter Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them to. So they passed by Mysia and went down to Troas”* (Acts 16:6-8).

Now Paul could very well have disobeyed Jesus and found a way to go into Bithynia, or to preach in Mysia, or try to preach the Word in the province of Asia, but it would only have brought him additional struggles and problems and disappointments. But Paul’s love for Jesus kept his attention on following the Holy Spirit’s guidance to where he was to go and preach. **He didn’t buck the leading of the Holy Spirit, but rather obeyed Him in love**, and, as we heard in the lesson for today, they were well received in Macedonia by those who were eagerly looking for instruction in the ways of Jesus.

Through the vision given to him, Paul saw that the Holy Spirit was already preparing the lives of those in Macedonia to hear about Jesus. Just as Peter had received his vision which prepared him to go to the house of Cornelius, a Roman centurion, Paul was directed by the Holy Spirit to go over to Philippi. And they were received by Lydia and others who had gathered for prayer. It was the beginning of the Philippian Christian Church.

Had Paul not followed the Holy Spirit's guidance, he could have spent the rest of his life trying to go into places that were not ready for hearing about Jesus. Yet because of His love of Jesus, Paul obeyed and was used in a mighty way to bring Salvation to so many more in Macedonia and Greece. That's not to say that the ministry was easy, but that God was preparing the hearts and minds of the people to receive Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord of their lives.

So here in the account of Paul's travels, we see **three things that we need to do to show our love for Jesus**. First, to love Jesus, **we don't look out for our own interests, but look for meeting the interests of others**. We are to look beyond ourselves so that we might be open to obey the Holy Spirit's leading to do the work of Jesus.

Second, to love Jesus, **we are to look at the mission field right before us** to find where God is preparing for us to go. We follow the Holy Spirit's guidance to take Jesus to those who are ready to hear about Him. There's nothing harder than to go to people who do not want to hear about Jesus. Pray and trust the Holy Spirit to guide you into the places that will be receptive to hearing the Gospel message.

Third, to love Jesus **we are to teach others the things of Jesus** so that they may also come to put their trust and faith in Him. Our world so desperately needs those who will boldly follow the Holy Spirit's guidance to take the light of Jesus Christ out into the darkness so that hope and life and love are found.

Then, as we look into the lesson of Revelation 21 & 22, we hear a portion of John's vision of what Heaven looks like. **God has prepared a place for us to be with Him as we accept Jesus Christ**

into our lives as Savior and Lord. It is amazing to hear what God has in store for His faithful followers as they love Jesus and live for Him each day.

Here we see that the new City of Jerusalem will no longer have a temple “*because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple*” (Revelation 21:22). We will be living in the presence of the Lord God Almighty, with Jesus as our brother, and the saints and elders joining us in praise and thanks and glory given to the Lord. There will not be different churches dividing us and guiding us to worship in particular ways, but we will be one church, one body of Christ focused on worshipping God through the Lord Jesus Christ.

Likewise, “*the city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp. The nations will walk by its light...*” (Rev. 21:23-24). The light of the Son of God will never go out, never be hidden behind a cloud or behind the earth, and this light will be very different than the light of the solar power of the Sun. The Light of God shining through Jesus to the nations assembled into the Holy City of Jerusalem will never scorch or burn or destroy anyone or anything. It will be the glorious light of the Lord God Almighty, so there will not be any cancer caused by the radiation of God’s glory. And this light will give life to all who are in the city.

And because the city will be illuminated by the glory of God, there will be no reason for its gates to be closed. “*On no day will its gates ever be shut, for there will be no night there*” (Rev. 21:25). All sin will have been destroyed, so the gates of the city will never need to fear the attack of an enemy. “*Nothing impure will ever enter it, nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb’s book of life*” (Rev. 21:27).

Can you imagine it, a place free from sin, free from terrorists, free from war, free from hate, free from greed, free from pride, free from sickness, free from death? No armies will ever march against it. No armed gunmen will threaten anyone there. No mad dictator will ever be able to overtake the city. **When the new City of Jerusalem comes down from heaven, everything wicked and evil will have been destroyed and we will have no fear about the capture of the city.** The gates will stand open

wide for all those who have faithfully lived and died and been raised from death to enjoy and walk through, without any worries, for it is the City of God.

Oh what a day that will be, to be in the presence of the Lord God Almighty, given to us through the blood of Jesus Christ shed on our behalf to eliminate all sin and evil from us. What rejoicing there will be! We will be living with new spiritual bodies that will never wear out, never experience pain or sickness, never to die. Can you imagine it? We will be fed by the tree of life, providing enough food for all those there, ready for the picking, renewed every month for the enrichment of the nations. There will not be any plague to destroy its fruit, no drought to prevent its growth, and no pestilence to destroy the provision of food. Even *“the leaves of the trees are for the healing of the nations”* (Rev. 22:2). The curse of sin will have been removed, so we will be able to enjoy the bounty of the harvest without having slaved and toiled and labored to produce it from the ground of the earth. There will be no weeds or thistles or invasive species to contend with. God’s provision will be for us to enjoy for all eternity, and we will live in the presence of the Lord God, seeing His face with no fear of death. Can you see it? It will be just as the Garden of Eden was before the introduction of sin.

Because we love Jesus, obey His commands, and follow His teachings, we will inherit all this. Our work will be given to us by the Lord to serve Him gladly in all we do. It will not be a burden to serve the Lord, but a rich and glorious opportunity to praise Him for His faithfulness and promise. We’ll not have to scratch and scrape and save and labor to have our being in the city of God because we will be able to enjoy all of His provisions.

Because we love Jesus, **there are three things that we can do in preparation for this glorious day.** First, we look at the future beyond this earthly life in order to find our hope and life. There is no need to look at the present to sustain us and provide for us through our hard work or government handouts. **There is so much for us to look forward to when we love Jesus with all our hearts, there is no need to look at the present things of this world.** Everything will become new!

Second, because we have so much to look forward to, **we can live in this present life expecting**

so much more from the future. We don't need to worry about the trials and troubles of all that is going on around us. There is no need for worries about famines, or wars, or persecutions, or poverty, or riots, or corruption, or hatred, or taxes, or rent payments, or food shortages, or price gouging. We have no need to fear pandemics, or national shut-downs, or vaccinations, or travel restrictions. There will be no need for us to be worried about church divisions or how we can keep our properties. Though these things are happening here in this world, there will be nothing like that in the new city of Jerusalem. We can live freely here in this life knowing that the best things are yet to come when we love Jesus with all our heart, soul, mind and strength.

Third, **when we love Jesus, the knowledge of what is waiting for us should be enough for us to freely share with others about what our future looks like as followers of Jesus.** Knowing that God is good on His word, we have been given the key-hole peek into what we have ready for us. If that isn't enough to convince someone to follow Jesus, then I don't know what there is that would convince them. If they will not be able to look forward to the delights of Heaven, then they are blinded by the things of this world, and they will never look beyond here to see there.

But the challenge to love Jesus brings us back to our own day, in how we are to live while we are here. Listen to how Jesus challenges us. This is John 14:15-29. (READ John 14:15-29)

Jesus starts out with very basic information, *"If you love me, you will obey what I command"* (John 14:15). To love Jesus means to make Him the most important person in our life, above our spouse, above our children, above our church, above our job, above even the government. Jesus must be first in our life, our all-in-all. And when He becomes primary in our life, it means that we submit everything in our life to His control. We become the servant and He becomes the Master. The servant willingly does all that the Master says when there is love for the Master. Love brings trust, and trust produces action.

So when we love Jesus as our Master, it's not when we find it convenient to serve Him, but every second of our day. **We are to let Jesus live through us.** We are to shine His light into the world

so that they can see what they have to look forward to once they claim Him as their Savior and Lord. It means that we give Him all our hurts, all our struggles, all our desires and all our dreams, so that He can lead us through them to be His disciples. It works like this.

David Gibson, of Idaho Falls, Idaho tells this interesting account. “My friend's father, an Army sergeant, tried for 25 years to quit smoking. After multiple failed attempts, he went in for his yearly medical exam with an Army doctor. The physician told him that his health was being severely harmed by smoking and that he should stop. The sergeant confessed he knew he should stop and, in a tone of despair, related his multiple attempts to stop smoking over many years.

“The physician looked at him and said, ‘What are these two bars on my lapel?’

“The sergeant replied, ‘They mean you are a captain.’

“Yes,’ said the captain, ‘And they also mean I outrank you, and I am giving you a direct order to stop smoking.’

“My friend's father went home and never smoked another cigarette. He could not quit on his own, even after years of trying, but he could quit when he understood the power of a direct order from a superior officer. He was thoroughly indoctrinated by the United States Army and not willing to violate an order.

“As believers in Christ, our Commander in Chief has given us many commands in the New Testament. When we take them as seriously as this sergeant took his order to quit smoking, we'll be surprised how God can transform our lives.”² And we'll be amazed at what we can do for Him.

So we see three more things from Jesus about how we are to love Him. First, we are to obey His commands. Not just when we want to, not just when they agree with our perspective in life, not just to use to further our own agenda. We obey Jesus as our Commanding Officer, recognizing His authority and power in order to experience a full transformation of our lives for His glory. We obey all His commands because we love Him, and honor Him, and serve Him in all our ways.

² (PreachingToday.com, *More Perfect Illustrations*, [Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2003] pg. 44)

As we obey His commands, we will be welcomed into the love that Jesus shares with His Father. Jesus tells us, “*Whoever has My commandments 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*” (John 14:21). Our obedience shows our love for Jesus. Again, Jesus tells us, “*He who does not love Me will not obey My teaching...*” (John 14:24).

Second, **to love Jesus means that we can abide in His peace**. Jesus knows the struggles we face as humans, after all, He lived among us as one of us for 33 years. Though the world may be turning upside down with evil and wickedness, Jesus has promised us the power of His Holy Spirit so that we might endure it all and stay in love with Him. And the power of the Holy Spirit is much more than any power of human authority. The Spirit enables us to do so much more than we can ever do on our own.

Finally, **to love Jesus means that we have no need to fear**. Jesus tells us that since we have His Holy Spirit, since we have His peace, “*Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid*” (John 14:27). Fear comes when we recognize our own inadequacy, our own deficiencies, and our own weakness. Fear is generated by those with greater authority over us to make decisions that could influence our lives. But with the power of the Holy Spirit filling us, there is no need to fear, because we are filled with the greatest power of the universe. And when we have the greatest power of all filling us, what is there to make us afraid? When we know who holds the future, when we know what that future is, there is no need to fear anything from this world.

The Apostle Paul stated it best, “*For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain*” (Philippians 1:21). **Our challenge then, is to love Jesus Christ, obey His commands, and trust in His authority and power so that we may live in Him and go to be with Him.** Let’s pray.

Father, thank You for Your call in our life to love Jesus. Thank You for Your guidance and protection through the Holy Spirit, given to us as we obey Jesus. Thank You for Your promise to be with You when this life comes to a close and we remain faithful to Jesus. May we always live in the peace of Jesus, which goes beyond our own understanding, so that we might be victorious for Jesus in all we do and say. Give us the courage to live for Jesus unafraid by anything that this world might do. Keep us faithfully in love with Jesus as His disciples, so that we might tell His great Good News to everyone around us. Let nothing else take Jesus’ place in our life, so that He remains our all in all. This we pray in Jesus’ Name. AMEN.