

How to Love Jesus - Kevin Miller, 30 minutes, **John 14:15-31** (#499)

Introduction: It's not quite Valentine's Day, but since we're coming up on it, I thought I would ask: how do you plan on loving others? If you are married, have you made plans to honor your spouse? Or how about just the fun of sending cards or the excuse to buy candy for one another? Those are good things, too!

But have you ever stopped to think about what you are doing: why is it that we think buying things for one another will show love? Isn't that odd? But, of course, it is the symbolism that is far more important than the gift: when we buy something for others – at least, if we do it well – we are being thoughtful to what they would find honoring. When we spend money, we are using something that took hard work to earn and simply giving it to somebody else, no strings attached. In that sense, what we are doing *should* – or at least, *can* – convey love.

Now, we're here in church. This isn't a paid promotional for Hallmark. Let's turn the question to something far more important: how do you show love to Jesus? We often speak of His love for us – and we should, He loved us first after all. But did you realize that the Bible speaks to how we are to love Him? What specifically that looks like will be the topic of our passage this morning. Join me in **John 14, starting with verse 15**, and we'll see the answer together...

14:15-17 In some sermons, the big point, the reveal, is kept 'till the end. But not here! How do we love Jesus? Answer: we keep His commandments. That is what He has taught the disciples in the Upper Room and it is what applies to every Christian today. Perhaps, having given the answer away so quickly, some of you think that I could love you all very well if we would now pray and wrap things up! Yet, **verse 15** brings up a number of questions – questions that we need answers to if we are to be faithful at this. Simply preaching that we each need to try harder at doing what Jesus has said isn't love, it isn't grace – no, it would be legalism if we left things there. So... because you pastor loves you... we need to see the whole picture of Christ's teaching in these verses.

The first thing Jesus says after making this observation is that the disciples will need help to do this. That's the assumption that is present in the following verses and I think it's safe for you and I to realize that we have the same struggles as well. A big hardship in the Christian life – one of the parts that our sinful hearts rebel against the most – is the fact that we simply can't do all that we would want to. Even if we have been brought up well and taught from the Scriptures, every Christian comes to realize what Paul said in **Romans 7**: "For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate." Isn't that true of all of us? We resolve to use our words better, and then we get mad and say something we regret. We decide to really take that Bible study lesson or sermon seriously and apply what it says, and then we forget. Or get caught up in the busy-ness of life. Brothers and sisters: what might seem the easiest command of all is actually the hardest! We need help if we are ever to genuinely love Jesus!

And the good news is found right here: Jesus – our advocate and high priest – isn't just preparing for His arrest and death and resurrection. He is also preparing what the disciples will need in His absence. Christ's plan isn't only about death and resurrection – the Gospel is bigger than that! And we are weaker than that! What we also need is help applying Christ's grace in our lives. This is what Jesus gets at here: we all need to obey Christ's commands. That is what love is. I dare say that no parent would think that their kids love them if they constantly disobey and flaunt everything the parent has taught. No, love is shown by doing what was commanded. So it is spiritually. But we need help for this: help that Jesus has planned and provided for. Help not just to have more self-motivation or to make our lives go easier, but instead help every bit as deep and necessary as Christ's perfect life and sacrificial death is. And John identifies that help for us: the Spirit. We need the help of God Himself, and we need it not just in a general sense, but specifically, inside of us: at work, every moment of every day.

Before we move on to see how this plays out, don't rush over the point too quickly: we need God's help. And we need His help not to reach our own goals, but to reach His goals. Christians are commanded to obey Christ, it is true. But that obedience isn't to earn salvation. Instead, that obedience reveals something

deeply true about us: it shows whether we love Jesus or not. I daresay that every honest Christian would agree that we need help with this. Praise God that it is provided. Realize, though, that this help removes any and every excuse from us. Because of God's generosity, you and I have no reason to not follow what Christ has taught. There is no hang-up that He hasn't provided for, no lack that Jesus hasn't met. To be a Christian is to follow your Master, and we do that this side of the cross by acting on what He has taught.

We each love Christ by what we do – and we all need help even in that. Next: you can know that you are loved, even in spite of your failures...

14:18-24 Christ's time for departure is soon coming. That sounds a bit too sanitized, doesn't it? Christ's "departure" will involve a wicked and unjust trial, a horrifying death, and burial in a tomb that's not even His own. Only after that will Jesus ascend to heaven. Yet, in each of these realities, we see Christ's love all the more because He is thinking about His disciples when He rightly could be thinking about what will soon happen to Himself.

Jesus wants His disciples to know and believe that He isn't abandoning them. Instead, Christ will provide for them in ways that are sometimes obvious, sometimes hard to understand, but always present.

First, Christ's death and resurrection is good news for the disciples. Because He will not stay dead – because Jesus will rise to new life – those who love Him, those who trust Him, shall likewise live also. That's great and amazing news!

Second, what the disciples have always needed is God Himself to help them. Christ's ascension won't leave them without help. Instead, God Himself will continue to guide His people. Remember that Jesus is fully God just as the Holy Spirit and the Father are fully God. We don't worship three Gods. Nor do we worship one God who changes forms like a Superman and Clark Kent kind of thing. Instead, the Bible presents it here and elsewhere as one God in three persons. So, when we are loved by Jesus, we are also loved by the Father (as

made clear here) and by the Holy Spirit. When we have unity with Christ, we have unity with God. That's an amazing thing. Look at the love of God for sinful and imperfect people like you and I! Look at how He blesses us! Look at how He cares for us – not only now, not only in the moment, but also in eternity! How can we not love that kind of a God? How can we do anything *but* respond to Him?

Third, you can be loved by the Father. I know that sounds like what I just said, but I want to highlight it for a reason: many of us did not grow up in the faith with good teaching on how the Old Testament and the New Testament fit together. It is common for Christians – maybe for some of you – to see God as if He was different in each testament. In the Old, He was angry and vengeful. In the New, He has had a change of heart and is kind and wonderful. Friends: nothing could be further from the truth! To keep Christ's commands isn't just to show our love to Jesus, but – as **verse 21** says – it is also to be loved by the Father. The same God who protected Noah in the flood, who split the sea, who rescued His people from slavery in Egypt – He loves those who do what Christ has taught. He loves you.

Notice the connection that Jesus is highlighting again and again in these verses – it's the same one as back in **verse 15**: Christians are those who love Jesus. Their love for Jesus isn't just an intellectual thought or something warm in their heart, but it comes out in their actions. And not just whatever actions seem good – but actions that flow from what Jesus has taught. Christians love Jesus by how they obey His teachings. The Bible doesn't have a category for Christians who say one thing and then constantly, purposefully, and rebelliously decide not to follow what their Lord has said. This isn't about trying and failing, but instead I'm pointing out those who are intentional in their hypocrisy. Those who think that following Jesus is a nice American thing to do, or something that conservatives should value. No, our faith is bigger than our nation, our traditions, our upbringing, or our politics. Our identity must be in Christ if we are to be Christian. And if that is our true identity, then – like any identity – it will change how we act.

You love Christ by what you do; you can know for sure that you are loved. Finally: you can have peace and hope in spite of your sin and the world...

14:25-31 Pay close attention to the work of the Holy Spirit – here, Jesus highlights one vital role: He will help the disciples to remember everything that Jesus has said to them. I should point out that some folks take this to only apply to the disciples, as if Jesus is only speaking about how the Bible would be inspired, the disciples remembering so that it could be written down. And you know what? That may well be part of what Christ is getting at here. But I don't think that's the sum of it. The context Jesus has been speaking about in this whole Upper Room chat is what He has in view. So, what Jesus says the Holy Spirit will help bring to mind are the things He has been talking about: serving others, loving one another, the fact that Christ must die if His people are to live. And – here in these verses – the Holy Spirit will also enable the disciples to remember what is required of them. How to follow Jesus. How to believe Him, trust Him; how to love Him.

What's more: how to have peace. Friends, we think that we live in fearful times. In some ways, we do. Many of you have spoken to me with all kinds of very real concerns – from health to government to the future. But I want you to recognize something here: nothing was easier for the disciples or the first Christians. They lived under an oppressive, anti-Christian government. They didn't get to elect their leaders. Abortion was sadly common. While gay marriage wasn't the sort of issue it is today, homosexuality was not just rare, but largely accepted. The taxes that Christians paid would go to all kinds of things they didn't like – even to support pagan practices. My point? We need to have a sense of proportion. Christ's words of peace and hope here aren't words from a kindler, gentler time. No, they are words for distressing times just like ours.

Christ gives peace. He gives it, ultimately, through the Holy Spirit who will remind us of what is true, even in a world that wants to erase those very truths. Jesus calls the disciples not to be afraid, not to wallow in troubles. Instead, their hope is to be rooted in His return. In fearful times, we have hope because we trust in the God who is sovereign over all things. The God who has committed Himself to saving us. The God who provides all we need, each day. This is the God who has perfectly arranged all that would happen that very night with Jesus. Did you

realize that? Christ's arrest and death wasn't a victory for the devil or forces of evil in the world. It wasn't because they are somehow very powerful or God wasn't able to stop them. No, it's the opposite: **verses 29-31** tell us that this is all happening because it is the Father's plan. The same Father who loves and provides. And, dear friends, that same Father loves and provides today.

The fearful things of this world – they aren't out of His control. The things that upset us and that we can't control – He is still in control of. Our response is not to get upset at every development or news story, but instead it is to love Christ by doing what He has said. Don't get distracted from that mission. And don't give in to the wrong belief that somehow our times are uniquely troubling. No: we are loved by the Father, we are cared for by Jesus, and we are indwelt by the Holy Spirit. That's real, genuine, hope. That's the kind of encouragement that directs our vision not to ourselves or our fears, but towards a world who desperately needs the hope that we have within us.

Let me conclude with the words of J. C. Ryle: "How is it, people often ask, that so many professing believers have so little happiness in their religion? ... The answer to [this question] [is that] few believers attend as strictly as they should to Christ's practical sayings and words. There is far too much loose and careless obedience to Christ's commandments; there is far too much forgetfulness that while good works cannot justify us they are not to be despised. Let these things sink down into our hearts. If we want to be eminently happy, we must strive to be eminently holy." By God's grace and empowerment, let's get to work...