

Do you love God? Show it!

2 in a series *The Essentials*

Message for Sunday, January 18, 2015
by Bruce Fraser

Scripture: James 2:19-20; Matthew 22:36-40; John 14:15-24

Children's Message: from Psalm 119:44-45

I wish I could fly like a bird. Have you ever wished you could do that? That would be awesome: fly up in the air, look around, go up to the highest tree and sit there. A bird in the air is free.

What would happen if you take that bird and place it at the bottom of a swimming pool, under two metres of water? Is it still free to fly? No, it has lost its freedom. It is no longer in the place where it belongs.

How about a fish? Watching a fish swim through water is beautiful. They are so graceful: with hardly any movement of their fins or tail, they speed through the water. Amazing! A fish in the water is free.

What would happen if you take a fish and place it on the sidewalk? How graceful is it now? Is it still free? No, of course not. It is no longer in the place where it belongs.

As Christians, the place where we belong is with Jesus, following his way. When we obey God's commands, that is when we are in the place we belong. That is when we can enjoy life to the fullest.

Sermon "Do you love God? Show it!" # 2 in a series *The Essentials*.

1) You believe in God? So what!

There's a story about a hiker in the mountains who slipped over the edge of a cliff. He was falling towards the jagged rocks hundreds of metres below, but just barely managed to grab onto the root of a tree which was sticking out from the cliff. There wasn't any way to climb back up, or even a ledge to stand on.

Dangling in the air, he began to cry for help. "Help! Please, help me!"

A voice answered, "Yes?" But the man couldn't see anyone up on the path. He asked, "Who are you?"

"God," the voice answered. "You called for help. What do you need?"

"Oh, God, thank God you're here — I mean, thank *you* you're here! Please God, can you let down a rope to pull me back up?"

"I don't have a rope; but I believe I can still help you. Do *you* believe I can help you?"

"Oh yes, God! I believe in you. You can do anything!"

"Good! I want you to let go of the root you're holding on to. Then I'll lift you up in the air."

There was a long pause. Finally the man called out, "Listen, is there anyone else up there?"

Believing in God is important. But belief is not the same as faith. Contrary to what many people think, merely believing in God is not what being a Christian is all about. James wrote in his letter exactly about this:

James 2:19-20, New Living Translation:

"Do you still think it's enough just to believe that there is one God? Well, even the demons believe this, and they tremble in terror! Fool! When will you ever learn that faith that does not result in good deeds is useless?"

The demons of hell believe in God — but it makes no difference in how they live!

2) The greatest thing we can do for God

What, then, is required of us? Don't ask me for the answer to such an enormous question. I am not qualified to answer. We must turn to the Bible to hear what God has to say to us about this. It just so happens that someone asked Jesus that exact same question:

Matthew 22:36-40, New International Version:

"Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?"

Jesus replied, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbour as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."

(Jesus makes it clear that we can't pick and choose between these two commandments. We can't say "I'll love God, but I'm not so keen on people." Nevertheless, each of these is a big topic, and I'll save my comments on love for other people until next week's message. For the rest of today, I'm talking about the first commandment, to love God.)

This is perfectly clear. No one can fail to understand this. Believing that there is a God means nothing. That is worthless. You might as well believe the moon is made of green cheese. Both beliefs will get you just as far — nowhere.

But here's what is important: love God! — in every part of your life.

That sounds wonderful! Everyone is in favour of love. The top 40 songs, whether you like rock and roll or country and western, are mostly about love. Some of them are even sung at weddings.

But: how do you love God? After all, we know how to love ourselves, our families, our friends. We even know how to love our neighbours and our enemies. We may not be good at doing it, but we think we know how.

3) How do you love God?

But how do you love God?

Again, we turn to the Bible for the answers to the all-important questions of life.

John 14:15

“If you love me, you will obey what I command.”

John 14:21

“Those who obey my commandments are the ones who love me. And because they love me, my Father will love them, and I will love them. And I will reveal myself to each one of them.”

John 14:23-24

“All those who love me will do what I say. My Father will love them, and we will come to them and live with them. Anyone who doesn’t love me will not do what I say.”

To Jesus, there is only one test of loving God, and that is obedience. Jesus showed that he loved God his Father by his obedience, even to the point of death on the cross. Jesus never allowed love to be reduced to emotion or mush. Love is a deliberate, conscious attitude which results in action.

We know all too well about those who profess their love in words but who, at the same time, bring pain and heartbreak to those whom they claim to love. There are young people who say that they love their parents, and yet cause them endless grief. There are parents who say they love their children, yet they beat them up, physically or emotionally. There are husbands who say they love their wives and wives who say the love their husbands. Yet you’d never know it by the way they are rude and inconsiderate.

If you really love God, you’ll show it by the way you live. Others will be able to see it in you.

4) You can start loving God right now

Let me summarize what I’ve said so far:

Belief in God — if that’s all there is to religion — is nothing. In fact it’s a deceptive trap.

Loving God is the most important part of being a Christian. And not just on Sunday, and not just in the “spiritual” part of your life, whatever that means. In everything you do.

Loving God means obeying God. Disobeying God means not loving God, rejecting God.

I am going to make a wild assumption right now. I am going to assume that some of you are not obeying God’s commands in your lives. Right now, to end this sermon, I want to talk specifically to you. (Note: I am also preaching to myself here.)

Is there some part of your life where you know you are not doing what is right? I won’t even suggest what it might be; the range of human sin is so vast no imagination could take it all in.

But you know what it is. You’ve known for some time that you have been turning away from what you know is the right thing to do. Usually you can ignore the feeling. Sometimes you really feel guilty, but you can make excuses to explain why it’s not *that* bad. But you know you’re only fooling yourself.

That is the Holy Spirit convicting you of sin. God is trying to reach out to you. God still loves you, and wants to give you an opportunity to start over.

Do you know that experience of receiving God’s love and forgiveness? There’s nothing better in the world! And when we do turn back to God, what joy there is! Listen again to the promise that Jesus makes:

John 14:23,

“All those who love me will do what I say. My Father will love them, and we will come to them and live with them.”

I would like to invite you to repent of that disobedience. To repent means three things:

- 1) Turn away from that sin. Now sin isn’t just doing something wrong. I could be *not* doing something right.
- 2) Turn to Jesus, and ask for forgiveness.

- 3) Continue with Jesus, and commit your life to him. Promise to be his disciple forever. Ask him to give you the strength you need to live right each day.

But you are not doing this for your benefit, your own selfish interests, getting a ticket to heaven. Do this because you love God, and because you want to please God by obeying him.

Some people say, "I'm doing the best I can. I can honestly say that there are not any areas of my life where I am consciously disobeying God, except for one little weakness. I seem to be able to control myself in every other area. But I am too weak to resist temptation in this one thing. I guess that's just my weak spot."

Is that something you might say? Let's be perfectly honest. That isn't weakness at all. You haven't been defeated by temptation. You have simply chosen to disobey God. You need to repent as much as anyone else, and even more if you really believe it doesn't matter.

I'm assuming that some of us are disobeying God and need to repent. It may be most or even all of us here. I know it's me. I'm asking you to turn from that sin, and to turn to Jesus. Again: I'm including myself in this.

In a moment, we are going to pray. During that time, you can do just that. If you feel that you want to tell God you're sorry, and commit your life unto him, and ask for his help, this is the time for that.

If you feel that you can't do that, it's up to you. I just want to remind you what that means. Disobedience is not just a little sin. It means you reject God. It means shutting God out of your life. It means you do not love God, and you're telling him that to his face. Maybe you can live with that. I hope to God you can't.

Prayer:

Dear Lord, I really do love you. I realize that I haven't always shown it by my actions. I'm sorry. I repent of my sins, and turn away from them. I ask your forgiveness.

Lord, I want to love you even more now. I want to follow you, to serve you, to obey you. You are the Lord of my life now. I commit myself to you, with all my heart and mind and soul. I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Next Steps:

- You just did it: renew your love for God.
- Continue that way: day by day, live in God's way.
- When you sin, immediately turn away from that, and ask God for forgiveness and strength to continue.