

Sermon Series: “Good News for Life”
“God’s *Great Gift*, Pt. 1”
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There are many different mottos we find out in our world today representing businesses. They tell the essentials of what is their purpose. This is especially true in insurance. E.g., the motto for All State Insurance is, “You’re in good hands with All State!” E.g., the motto for State Farm is, “Like a good neighbor, State Farm is there!” We also have a motto for our country. E.g., on our bills, such as \$20, \$10, and so on, and our coinage, they all have the same motto— “in God we trust”. That is a pretty lofty motto, isn’t it? There are many today who would want to remove this from our bills, but we cannot let that happen. They may say something like, “Well, not everyone in the U.S. believes in God”. This is true, but the vast majority do. Moreover, there is no neutral position. If we don’t have God on our bills, then we’ll have nothing, which is exactly the secular humanist position, and the U.S. Supreme Court has already claimed they are a religion for the purpose of the First Amendment. Many would like our nation to exercise separation of religion and state, but this idea came into our country for the purpose of getting government out of religion, not keeping religion out of the government! This is indeed a lofty motto, “In God we trust”, and worth defending. We will see that Jesus Himself actually had a motto.

READ John 14:15-24 (p. 109)

CONTEXT: Philip has asked Jesus to show him the Father, and Jesus responds by pointing to Himself and to all the amazing works He had been doing. And Jesus encouraged the disciples that they are to ask for anything in His name and it would be done—and they would be doing even greater things than He had been doing!

READ v 15. “To ask for something in Jesus’ name (v 14) implies that we love Him. So then, what does it mean to love Him? Jesus explained, with precision and profundity, to love Him means to obey Him! Cf. 1 John 4:21.” Jesus spoke here with precision— a concise, precise explanation of what it means to follow Him. In many ways we could even say it was His motto, because He says it two other times in our passage— vv 21,23— and warns against those who do not love and keep His words in v 24. We get the first part easily— “if we love Jesus”. Well, to be honest, who doesn’t love Jesus? It seems only the person who is clearly defines himself or herself as not a Christian could say otherwise. In a large part of the U.S., to define oneself as a Christian is to say in effect, “he/she is a pretty nice person”. E.g., I recall talking to a Christian about a friend we both knew, and this friend did not go to church much at all and did not seem very interested in growing in Christ, and I asked about the person’s spiritual state and the reply I got back was basically, “Oh, going to church is not his thing, but he is a Christian for sure”. I could not help but think either this person did not know our mutual friend very well, or the definition of what a Christian is seems to be rather vague.

And if we love Him, great things will follow. It is like that in romance, isn’t it? E.g., I recall the story of the courtship of Drew and Brittany Brees. In his autobiography *Coming Back Stronger* he told about the first time he met Brittany was at a party where he got very drunk and made a fool of himself in front of

her— and totally turned her off to him. When he sobered up he realized his great mistake, and that was *not* who he was— he was not a big drinker, partier. So he apologized to her and she eventually allowed him another chance— like a time he was driving her in a car with a stick shift, and he claimed he knew how to drive such cars, and they went down the road bucking back and forth because he hadn't a clue what he was doing— and they laughed the whole way! But he pursued her because he desired a relationship with her, even though he made a great mistake at the first. That is similar to our love for Jesus— if we love Him, we will keep His commandments. The profundity in what Jesus says here comes with His words, “you will keep my commandments”. This is where the rubber meets the road for Christians— do we keep His commandments, do we obey Him? From my experience as a pastor I would say people struggle in obedience to Christ in three main areas: romance/sex, material things/money, and sharing their faith. E.g., I recall talking with a couple who came to me once about getting married, and I shared the gospel with them and asked them if they wanted to follow Jesus. They both indicated that they indeed did want to follow Jesus. I counselled them that when we follow Jesus as Lord and Savior He would be the One in charge of our lives, and this would not be easy all the time. They assured me they wanted to follow Jesus. So I said, ok, that's great—now I understand you are cohabiting together, and Scripture is clear that sex is a wonderful gift from the Lord to be enjoyed only in the marriage relationship, so how can you honor Christ in your relationship. Their faces turned from happy to not so happy, and they indicated that one of them moving out or even moving to a separate room was not something they were willing to do— it was a bridge too far. E.g., I recall during my InterVarsity Christian Fellowship days in college when I was struck by the great disappointment of leaders falling away from Christ over the area of romance. A young woman in our Bible studies started dating a non-believer (he was an atheist or agnostic) and eventually married him and we never really heard back

from her. A couple of my guy friends fell sexually and did not come back to our fellowship. It is important only to date and only to marry a Christian—the difference in worldview and commitment to Christ will necessarily clash with a non-believer in such areas as finances, entertainment, and childrearing. What are our boundaries around our marriages. E.g., I recall Billy Graham would not get in an elevator alone with another women, and Hilary Clinton asked to have a one-on-one meeting with him over a meal, and he would not do that. That may seem a little strong, and maybe we would put the boundaries in different places, but the important thing to ask ourselves is: what are the boundaries you and I are putting around our marriages to protect them?

Money is also an important area where Christians struggle in obedience to Christ. E.g., at “Understanding Tithing in the U.S.” at sharefaith.com from 2015, three striking things came out: first, Christians give less per capita as compared to the church during the Great Depression; second, 28% of those who tithe are debt-free (80% are credit card debt-free); third, 3-5 % of Christians tithe. We have all heard nice pastors who don’t like to make the church congregation feel uncomfortable over the issue of giving and tithing. I confess, I am not that type of pastor. I believe pastors often don’t address giving because they think it will reflect on them as a selfish issue and wanting a larger salary. But I appreciate the way you have generously provided for me, and I encourage you to give where God calls you to give. I believe the ministry here is a great place to invest our giving, but ultimately that is between you and God—I do not know what you give unless you tell me. E.g., I recall a guy making about a half million a year who told me if he tithed he would be giving \$50,000, and that was too much! His lack of God’s vision for giving was strong, as could be seen by his affluent house and luxury cars he owned. Finances are the way God has allowed ministries to work today, and we must be faithful in the area of our personal wealth— after all, it is all His anyway! E.g., I recall a man telling me about the death of his wife— after

working for 35 years she retired and about a year later she came down with breast cancer and died about a year after that; here she was, a woman who over 35 years probably thought all this saving and working would lead to a great retirement, but it all ended much earlier than she expected. Our lives can end in the snap of a finger!

Evangelism is the final area I see Christians struggle to keep with Christ's commandments. E.g., I recall a number of conversations I have had with Christians over the years about why they rarely share their faith with their friends, and the answer I often get back is basically, "I don't want to become their enemy!" I think Jesus would say two things to us: first, "Even if you become enemies with your friends, I am worth it!" We need to recall, we serve a crucified Messiah, who was hated. In John 17:14, Jesus prayed this about His disciples, "I have given them your word, and the world has hated them because they do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world". And second, I think Jesus would say, "I did not call you to give people a monologue, to tell them they are going to hell, and to show them how you have your life all together and happy as compared to theirs! I called you to love people into the Kingdom, to listen to them, to cry with them, to rejoice with them, to love them unconditionally, so that when we tell them what being a Christian involves— repent for the Kingdom of God has come near!— they will really be able to hear it and consider it because they will know we really care about them!"

Beloved, if we love Jesus, we will keep His commandments.