



If my people...

PRAYER + FASTING

“Blessed are all who fear the Lord, who walk in obedience to him.”

- Ps. 128:1

If my people...
PRAYER + FASTING

“To obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed is better than the fat of rams.”

- 1 Sam. 15:22

If my people...
PRAYER + FASTING

“Walk in obedience to all that the Lord has commanded you, so that you may live and prosper and prolong your days in the land that you will possess.”

- Deut. 5:33

If my people...
PRAYER + FASTING

“Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey all that I have commanded you.”

- Matt. 28:19-20

If my people...
PRAYER + FASTING

“For I know the plans I have for you, plans to prosper you and not to harm, plans to give you hope and a future.”

– Jer. 29:11

If my people...
PRAYER + FASTING

“Obedience is the road to freedom.”

- C.S. Lewis

If my people...
PRAYER + FASTING



If my people...

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“If you love me, keep my commands.”

- John 14:15

If my people...
PRAYER + FASTING

“I am the way, the truth, and the life, no one comes to the Father except through me.”

- John 14:6

If my people...
PRAYER + FASTING

“The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and life to the full.”

- John 10:10

If my people...
PRAYER + FASTING

“God so loved the world that he sent his only Son, that whoever would believe in him should not perish but have eternal life.”

- John 3:16

If my people...
PRAYER + FASTING

Truth:

**Our obedience does NOT move us into a
relationship with the Lord.
Our love relationship moves us to obedience.**

If my people...
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“Perfect love casts out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love.”

– 1 John 4:18

If my people...
PRAYER + FASTING

***Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it.
Prone to leave the God I love.
But here's my heart, Lord, take and seal it.
Seal it for thy courts above.***

- Hymn, *Come thou Fount of Every Blessing*

If my people...
PRAYER + FASTING

“I will not leave you as orphans.”

- John 14:18

If my people...
PRAYER + FASTING

“Because I live, you also will live.”

- John 14:19

If my people...
PRAYER + FASTING

“Tell the priests who carry the ark of the covenant: ‘When you reach the edge of the Jordan’s waters, go and stand in the river.’”

- Joshua 3:8

If my people...
PRAYER + FASTING

“Whoever has my commands and keeps them is the one who loves me. The one who loves me will be loved by my father, and I too will love them and show myself to them.”

- John 14:21

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“Whoever has my commands and keeps them is the one who loves me. The one who loves me will be loved by my father, and I too will love them and show myself to them.”

- John 14:21

***“Blessed are the pure in heart,
for they shall see God.”***

- Matt. 5:8

If my people...
PRAYER + FASTING

Sunday Sermon

1/29/23

Series: If My People...

Passage: John 14:15-21

Title: A time of obedience

Good morning church! Please turn in your bibles to John 14. We will be reading verses 15-21 this morning. Many of us have been participating throughout January in a time of prayer and fasting – of seeking the Lord. We’ve learned this month that prayer and fasting is meant to be a time of preparation, of repentance, of denial, of listening in the life of the follower of Christ. Today, we will close our series and our season of corporate prayer and fasting with the subject of obedience. **Prayer and fasting is a time of obedience.**

In the Psalms David writes, ***“Blessed are all who fear the Lord, who walk in obedience to him.”*** - Ps. 128:1

The prophet Samuel declares, ***“To obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed is better than the fat of rams.”*** - 1 Sam 15:22

In the Law, God says, ***“Walk in obedience to all that the Lord your God has commanded you, so that you may live and prosper and prolong your days in the land that you will possess.”*** – Deut. 5:33

And even Jesus, in His great commission, says to his followers, ***“Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.”*** Matt. 28:19-20

God’s Word is clear that obedience is the expectation of the Christian life.

When it comes to our relationship with the Lord, there is no time like today, to respond in obedience to his voice. He’s God. And as God, he has complete authority to command our lives. But in that truth – it is also good for us to understand his heart. God is not threatened when don’t obey. He doesn’t have security issues. He’s not sacred of losing control. His command to obey is not for him, it’s for us. It comes out of his goodness and his love. He sees us in our need. He sees us stuck in the pit. He tells us, “I have plans for you.” ***“For I know the plans I have for you, plans to prosper you and not to harm, plans to give you hope and a future.”*** – Jer. 29:11.

We say, “Great! How do I lay hold of that?” Answer: Obedience. God says, “You have to climb the ladder I’ve provided for you instead of trying to get out of the pit on your own.” You say, “Well can’t you just beam me out?” Yup, but I’ve given you the ladder. And sometimes in that we say, “Yeah, I’m not a fan of that ladder.” And God says, “Ok. But if you want out of the pit. That’s the way out.” CS Lewis says, ***“Obedience is the road to freedom.”*** I heard it said this week that God isn’t anxious about our bondage. He sees us in it. He cares. He wants us to be free. But we’re not going to manipulate him.

Obedience is a fitting end for our series because, in times of prayer and fasting, God will often speak to us concerning some things – sins he wants us free from, relationships he wants to heal, areas of our lives that are broken. And in that, we have the choice to respond to him in obedience, or to continue on in our own power and striving.

This brings us to our passage this morning: John 14:15-21. In it, Jesus is speaking. Listen to his words. [read and pray]

I think I've told this story before, so bear with me if you have heard it. During my time as a missionary with CRU, I was doing a study with some of my co-workers on the grace of God. I don't remember anything about the lesson itself outside of the fact that the content was about listening to the Lord and responding to him in obedience. And as he often does when we take the time to slow down and listen to him (I think I heard a sermon on that recently), during that time he spoke to me. He said, "Tell your sister about the money."

Now, let me put this in context for you. I have a solid relationship with my sister now, but growing up, that was not always the case. Because I was better than her. Just kidding. But there was definitely some sibling rivalry there. We didn't always see eye to eye. She was strong willed; I too had a will. She was the oldest, I was the strongest. She pushed the envelope; I took the route of the golden child. So once she left home, we weren't hostile to one another, but there were still some significant underlying issues there.

It was the type of relationship that you had to do some management of the relationship - do the right things, say the right things, tread carefully. So that is the reality I'm living with when the Lord says to me, "Tell your sister about the money." Alright so the money. At this point I'm in my mid 20's. When I was growing up, my sister always did a great job of saving her money. Let's just say I was more of a spender. She kept her money in a glass jar in her room. At times there would be hundreds of dollars in there. At times I wanted candy. At times, I didn't have any money for candy. So what did I do? I took some of her money. What's that called? Stealing. God might have something to say about that.

I got away with it because she just kept putting more in the jar. She didn't ever know how much was in there. She wouldn't really miss it. And, you know what, she never did. Now 15 years later, here I am, having become a Christian, having moved on from my stealing days, now I'm praying and listening for whatever the Lord might want to say to me, and he says, "Tell your sister about the money."

"Uh...no." He says, "Tell her." "Why? That's in my past. I've already been forgiven. It totally doesn't even matter anymore. She's married with kids and a husband, and she has her own money and they're not hurting. She doesn't care." Tell her. "Why? You know the type of relationship we have. By telling her I could sacrifice the little relationship I do have. It makes no sense why you would tell me to do this."

But the command remained. Tell her.

So I called her up. “Hey Steph. This is going to sound out of nowhere, but remember that jar of money you use to have in your room? Yeah. I used to take money out of that jar. And the Lord just told me I needed to call and tell you, and ask for forgiveness and to make restitution.” I’m not going to lie. That was an awkward conversation. But it was also good.

One of our core values here at PCC is the value of “Authentic Community.” We value the process of becoming - not arriving. We believe that everyone has a next step in their spiritual growth, in their maturity with the Lord. And in that journey, God is continually at work in us and in those around us, peeling back layers, bringing his healing, his life, and freedom as we grow in our relationship with him.

My obedience in calling my sister allowed him to work in my life, as well as in her life. But I had to trust him that he knew what he was doing. And I had to entrust to him that relationship. For flourishing to happen, I had to get off my plan and onto his plan.

In our passage this morning, Jesus says, **“If you love me, keep my commands.” (John 14:15).** That word keep is a word that implies “a careful tending” – something we need to be attentive to.

I can’t tell you how many conversations I’ve had throughout the years that go something like this: “I have an addiction and I really want to be free from it.” Great. What has the Lord said about it? He told me to tell my wife about it. Have you done that? “Well, no.”

“I am struggling with anxiety in my life, and I don’t want to anymore.” Great. What has the Lord said about that? That he wants me to cast my cares on him. Are you doing that? Well, no.

Jesus says, “Keep my commands.” – carefully tend to what I have said and do it. One of the main reasons we don’t hear God speaking is because when he has spoken, we have chosen to harden our hearts and not obey his voice. “I’m not doing that.”

And this is where the first part of the verse comes in. Jesus says, “If you love me.”

To properly understand what Jesus is saying, we need to understand the context. If you are familiar with John 14, you know that earlier in the chapter, Jesus is talking to his disciples about knowing the way. The way where? The way to the Father, the way to God, the way to a restored relationship, the way to life. And Jesus says in one of the bible’s most famous verses, John 14:6. Jesus says, **“I am the way, the truth, and the life, no one comes to the Father except through me.”**

Earlier in John 10, Jesus tells his followers, **“I have come so that you might have life and life to the full.”**

You see, when humanity sinned way back in the garden of Eden, the problem wasn’t just that all of creation fell under the curse and bondage of sin, but it was also that we were now separated from God, cut off from the source of life. And where there is no life, there is only death for the human race.

Jesus is saying, "I've come to restore that." ***"God so loved the world that he sent his only Son that whoever would believe in him should not perish but have eternal life."***

Jesus modeled for us the path of obedience. In his love for us, he willingly drank from the cup the Father had for him, so we could be in relationship again with the God of life.

I ordered a Starbucks on the way to church this morning. You know how it goes. You order on the app, you walk in, find your cup, pick it up. Starbucks puts your name on the cup. You say, I want coffee. They say, "Great, your coffee is located in this cup." But often when I walk in, I see lots of different choices, lots of different cups. I could say, "I want my coffee to be in this other cup." They would say, "It's not there. Your coffee is found in this cup." This is much like our obedience to the Lord. We say, "God, I want you. I want freedom. I want joy. Whatever it may be. And God says, "Great. It's found in this cup." We often say, "Well I don't want that cup. What about this cup instead?" God says, "You can drink that cup. But that's not going to give you what you want. What you want is found in this cup."

What we want is found in a love relationship with the Lord Jesus. That is the cup we must drink from, because there is no other way to life.

That's why Jesus says, "If you love me." Write this down – this is essential truth for life: **Our obedience does not move us into a relationship with the Lord (religion), our love relationship moves us to obedience (that's Christianity).**

Obedience is the act of remaining attached to him because we love him. And we love him, because he has first loved us. This command is not a *threat* by Jesus. He's not saying, "If you love me, obey me or else I'm gonna give you leprosy!" It's also not a *guilt trip*. He not saying, "Listen, only those who really love me will obey me. You're not obeying me, so you must not really love me."

Listen: Those are broken expressions of love. Many of us have grown up in family situations or even in a religion situation where broken forms of love are used to manipulate or control. God's love is not broken love, God's love is perfect love. And 1 John tells us that ***"perfect love casts out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love."*** – 1 John 4:18

Listen: God's love is different. Scripture tells us, ***"There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."*** We are told that, ***"God loves us with an everlasting love."*** We learned last week that He **is for us**. Once we have been born again in Jesus Christ, when we, by faith, truly believe that he is our salvation, he places his spirit in us, he gives us his eternal life. And when that happens, we are forever secure in God's love. What happens if I don't obey? You're still fully loved. Fully accepted. Fully valued. Fully secure in Christ. The bible is clear that our salvation has nothing to do with us and everything to do with the finished work of Jesus Christ in his death and resurrection. And since I did nothing to earn it, there is nothing I can do to lose it. I can only choose whether or not to receive his love for me. Will you receive God's love for you this morning? Will you, by faith, choose to follow Christ? To give him your life, so that he can give you his?

God has made his love, his life, his salvation available to each one of us this morning, but he will not force anyone to take it. He simply invites us to follow. That's what it means to live in obedience to him because we love him. We've chosen him as he has chosen us.

But here is where Satan starts whispering in our ears, manipulating this truth. "You're not good enough. You're not secure. God's actually ashamed of you. You need to do better, try harder, sin less before you could ever enter into God's love." NO! His love for you is perfect.

But in that love, he also knows where your life is found, where your good is, what will hurt you, and what will fill you. It reminds me of that great hymn "Come thou Fount of Every Blessing." In that song there is this truth – we sing **"Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it. Prone to leave the God I love. But here's my heart, Lord, take and seal it. Seal it for thy courts above."** The truth is we are often prone to wander away from the Lord of life. Enticed by our own pride, our own desires, the world around us - we still strive to try to fill our own cups, to find life our way.

And in that we find God saying to us, "What you want - life, joy, meaning, purpose, hope – it's not found in that cup. If you love me, keep my commands. Attach yourself to me. Drink that cup. That's where what you are looking for is found."

That's why God gives us the Holy Spirit – to be our helper, our advocate, the One who stands alongside us supporting us on our journey with the Lord. In verse 18 Jesus says, **"I will not leave you as orphans."** God helps us in our journey.

Why do we need God's help? Because he is our source. Because we can't do it on our own. Because what God has for us is more than we could ever produce ourselves. And the journey is to get there is different and often more difficult than the journey we would ever choose for ourselves.

But obedience is choosing to drink the cup God has for us. It's not so bad when the path is easy. It's much more difficult when the path is hard. But in all things hear the Lord's promise in it (verse 19) **"Because I live, you also will live."**

Returning full circle to our first week of the series about preparation. In Joshua chapter 3 it is important for us to see that obedience followed the preparation. Once the people of God prepared themselves, the Lord told the priests, "Now take the ark and go and stand in the river."

What if the people of God said, "Why? That doesn't make any sense." What if, in going to the river, the priests waited on the bank instead of going in? They'd still be waiting. The ones who see the glory of God, who experience his movement in their lives, his blessing, are the ones who are attached to him, obedient to his commands.

Jesus finishes our passage this morning by saying, **"Whoever has my commands and keeps them is the one who loves me. The one who loves me will be loved by my father, and I too will love them** (don't miss this, he says) **and show myself to them."**

It reminds me of Jesus' words in the sermon on the mount, "***Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.***"

Do you want to encounter God? Experience him? His renewal? His life? Love him and obey him. What's he telling you to do? When I asked that question, some of you immediately thought of something. That's probably it. Don't overthink it.

Maybe it's confessing something to your spouse. Or going to a person and asking forgiveness. Or truly releasing someone or something to God. Or following him.

Scripture tells us, "Today, if you hear his voice, don't harden your hearts." God has made his blessing available for us. It's free but he places it somewhere. "Tell your sister about the money." Your blessing is in that cup. The question obedience asks is, "will we drink from it?"