

All Bark and No Bite

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O praise the name of the Lord our God. O praise his name forevermore. It's a wonderful declaration but today it also offers us a challenge. It's easy to praise his name when there's money in the bank. It's easy to praise his name when everybody in your family is actually getting along. It's easy to praise his name when you're in good health. But that song we sang says, "I praise his name forevermore." That means in the good and the bad. That means in the times of prosperity and in the time of pain. And yes, it's been a wonderful declaration but it also serves as a challenge today, how can we be individuals, how can we be families, how can we be a church, how can we be a community who praises the name of the Lord no matter what our circumstance and no matter what our environment may be? That is the challenge today.

Let's pray.

Lord, we do praise your name forevermore. You are the Lord our God, but we confess that you're not just the God of circumstance, you're not just the God of environment, you're not just the God of good times or abundance or health. You are the God of the mountain but you are the God of the valley. You are the God of pleasure but you're also the God of pain. You're the God of company and you're the God of loneliness. So Lord, today as we open your word, as you challenge us not just to praise your name in the good times, God, may you allow us to rejoice in those times but may you allow us to have your strength when the environment, when the situation around us, does not appear to be one worth of praising. Lord, challenge us today. It is in the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.

I want to encourage you this morning to open your Bibles to the Gospel of John 14. As you turn to John 14, I know many of you are those that like to take notes and such, and if that's the case and that's wonderful, there are two other places in the Bible that we're going to find ourselves today that I'm going to be alluding to but some of you like to actually, you know, see it in print or see it on your phone or pad or device or whatever it may be, and so we're also going to find ourselves in the book of Job and also in the Gospel of Mark. Job 1 and 2 and also in the Gospel of Mark 10 and 12, but primarily today we find ourselves in John 14.

If you haven't been with us in a while or maybe you're a guest or visitor with us, we are very quickly heading toward what we know as chapter 15 and this is where we've been

heading for an entire calendar year, for two weeks from today we begin that expected journey through John 15 where Jesus makes this statement, he says, "I am the vine and you are the branches. He that abides in me and I in him shall bear much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing." And we as a church family, not only in this environment but even on a day to day, weekly basis this coming semester, this coming season, are walking through what does that really mean for our lives? What does it mean to have Jesus as the vine and for us to be the branches? What does it mean to abide in him? What does it mean to realize that apart from him we cannot bear any fruit?

But today in chapter 14, we find ourselves chronologically very near to chapter 15. It's not just a chapter away, in fact, it's just a few moments away because chapters 13 onward, we find ourselves in the last chronological day in the life and the ministry of Jesus Christ. In fact, this is crucifixion night. What I mean by that is we are about 12 hours away from Jesus' eventual crucifixion. In chapter 13, Jesus has washed the disciples' feet, not only proclaiming verbally but giving us an incredible picture of his grace and his mercy and his love and his message.

We come into chapter 14, at the very beginning Jesus makes this statement after he has washed their feet, he says that if we believe in God, we ought to believe in him also, for in his Father's house are many mansions, and he goes to prepare a place for us and he will return again and bring us unto himself. Thomas, who we often call Doubting Thomas, says, "But Jesus, how can we know the way? How can we know that what you're telling us is what we should believe?" And in verse 6 of chapter 14, Jesus says, "I am the way, I am the truth, I am the life," and in that very politically incorrect statement he says, "and nobody comes to the Father but by me." Later in chapter 14, I guess he begins to get a sense of the room, so to speak, and he says, "Don't panic. Don't worry about it. It's all going to be okay. Yes, I'm going to depart from you but I will send another Comforter. I will send the Holy Spirit. I will send the Spirit of truth and rather than having me eat with you, rather than me walking beside you, the Spirit of God is actually going to live inside of you."

So here we are on the night before the crucifixion of Jesus Christ, here we are in the Upper Room. Chapters 13 and onward take place in a very snapshot of time and in chapter 14, in the midst of all this action, verse 15, it's the only verse I want to focus on out of chapter 14, Jesus makes this incredibly profound statement, "If you love me, keep my commandments." I'm not one for sermon titles but today I have appropriately titled the message, "All Bark, No Bite." Now, we know what that means in our culture. That means someone who does a lot of talking but not a lot of doing. That's someone who is loud with their mouth but silent with their feet. And what we discover is here in John 14, Jesus says, "If you love me, you will keep my commandments," and what we're going to discover over the next few moments is that we struggle with the same issue the disciples did. We struggle with talking a lot about Jesus but when push comes to shove, when the heat gets turned up, when it becomes inconvenient, oh, how difficult it is to follow all that barking with the biting, proverbially speaking.

In just a few hours, I mean a few hours literally, Jesus is going to be in the garden of Gethsemane. Judas is going to show up with 500 soldiers behind him and all of a sudden it's not going to be as popular to be associated with Jesus; all of a sudden it's not going to be as safe to be associated with Jesus and what happens to these guys who just had their feet washed by Jesus? They run for the hills. They're gone. Peter who said, "Oh, I would never turn my back on you," three times denies Jesus. In fact, he's even caught openly, verbally cursing the name of Jesus in a public environment. Judas has betrayed him and all with the exception of the Apostle John have run for the hills. These guys for 3 ½ years, they had their chest bowed out, they said, "Oh, Jesus, when this day comes, don't you worry, I've got your back." And what we discover is they all turned their back that night. All bark, no bite.

We're in good company today because oftentimes we struggle with verbalizing and speaking the things of the Lord but difficulty in actually living them out in our lives, and so this very simple yet profound verse, "If you love me, keep my commandments," what was Jesus saying to them? What is he saying to us today? I think initially we have to address what may be a bad definition or a wrong definition for love. I can't think of another word in our culture that's been more twisted or turned, and if you allow me to say, perverted than this word. We have learned to "love" everything and yet at the same time love nothing in our culture. But as you begin to study particularly biblically this concept or idea of love, there are actually two main words, two main definitions, two main constructs that are utilized in Scripture and hear me very clearly: neither one of them are bad, neither one of them are wrong, but what we're going to discover in just a moment is Jesus is utilizing the latter and not the former.

You see, there is a love of satisfaction and there is a love selflessness. Allow me to explain. When you say that you love something, maybe you say, "Well, I love this food. I love this meal. I love this game," what you're stating is that you're pleased with, you are content with, you are satisfied – listen – with the environment that you find yourself in. We love the games our teams win and we not so much the ones they lose. We love the meals that are pleasing to the taste and we don't love those that are not. There is nothing wrong with this concept, there is nothing wrong with this idea of loving an item, an object, an individual or situation, but it is limited not by its inherent characteristics but by the environment that it finds itself in.

Now, probably the best example in Scripture of this is a man by the name of Job. If you're not familiar with Job, as far as the Bible is laid out, though he finds himself in the middle right before Psalms, probably the first book of the Bible that was actually penned and inspired by the Lord. Job is probably the great great great or great great great great grandson of whom we know as Noah, the famous flood, ark story. Job is man who the Lord calls the greatest in the East. Job is a man who has 10 children, an incredible portfolio of finances. This man has got family. He's got finance, fortune, fame. This man has it all and that is the setting, that is the scene in the book of Job, and in that scene it says that the enemy himself, Satan, the devil, has a conversation with God and here's what he says, "Job only loves you, Job only serves you because everything's going well. Everything's going the way he wants it to. If you make it not so easy on him, I don't think

he'll respond the same way." The Lord says, "You don't know my servant, Job. Fine, I'll give you a little bit of a leash. Go for it." And the next day, Job loses all of his 10 children; he loses all of his fortune; he loses all of his finances. A series of people come to him and say, "Hey, Job, I'm sorry, man, it is all gone." What does Job do? Job gets into the dust of the ground, he tears his clothes and he says, "From dust I came, dust I'll return. Blessed be the name of the Lord." The Bible says in Job 1:29 that he did not sin with his lips. Not a love of satisfaction, not a love of environment, not a love dependent upon the way I wish things were.

Chapter 2 of the book of Job. The same scene, different day. The devil says, "Okay, God, we obviously didn't turn enough heat up on him. We didn't make it tough enough. Yes, he has loved you. Yes, he has served you in the midst of losing the externals, but a man will change his ways for his own health and his own life. Let me touch his body." God says, "Fine, just don't take his life."

The next scene, we discover that Job is covered in some type of boils, disease, horrible skin condition from the top of his head to the bottom of his foot. The Bible is very descriptive. It says that he is on a pile of dung and the dogs are licking his sores. It's a sad state of environment and affairs.

Oh, but there is one more character that shows up, it's his wife. You know, of all the characters in Job 1 and 2, it's probably the one character he could do without and it's the only one that wouldn't go away. That's another sermon for a whole other day, folks. But nonetheless, here's what his wife does. His wife shows up and she says, "Can we not just curse God and get this over with?" And Job says at the end of chapter 2, he says, "Can we not receive good at the hand of God and also evil?"

Chapter 3. His three "friends" show up. Now let me give you a little warning in advance: if you're ever in person or online and you meet somebody by the name of Zophar, Bildad or Eliphaz, you need to run away and run away quick. These guys said they were friends but they were heartless in their interaction with Job and you get to chapter 8 of the book of Job and this is what I want to focus in on the character of Job. A guy by the name of Bildad, supposedly his friend, begins to speak. He's very theologically astute. He asked Job a very rhetorical question. He wants to know how Job is going to answer because in the situation, in the position Job is in, he is truly the only one who can answer this question. Here's what it says in Job 8:11, it says, "Can the rush," the papyrus, I'll get to that in a moment, "Can it grow apart from the mire?" Now I know what you're thinking to yourself, "What does that have to do with anything?" Well, what we know as the papyrus, what we know as the rush, it grows up in an environment that's very swampy and there has to be other plants around it. If it grows alone, it will shrivel up and die. It must have a fruitful positive environment around it or it cannot survive. What Bildad is asking Job, he's saying, "The faith that you proclaimed, the love you claim to have for the Lord, the one whom you served all your days, are you really going to continue or are you going to be just like that papyrus plant, are you just going to be like that rush? Are you just going to fade away because of the mire? That which was around you has gone away."

If you read the entire book of Job, you get to the 42nd chapter, do you know what you'll discover? That Job was true to his word. The Lord was right about who he was; that his love was not one of satisfaction but it was one of selflessness. It was one of putting the things of and the person of God even before his own health, his own well-being, and his own satisfaction with life. In fact, there's a big difference between satisfaction, that which pleases me, and selflessness which is that which gives to you.

You know, there's a famous passage of Scripture that we often hear in wedding ceremonies. I'll be honest with you, every opportunity I have to be a part of a wedding ceremony, I utilize it as well. It's 1 Corinthians 13. It's the great "love" chapter. It talks about that love doesn't envy, it doesn't boast, etc. Faith, hope and love but the greatest of these is love. In the end, love never fails. You know, it's interesting, though, what we know as the old King James Bible, it translates that word "charity." It's a love that's more than affection. It's a love that's more than satisfaction. It is a love that places somebody else ahead of themselves. You see, when you say that love does not boast, you're saying that somebody else is more important than you. When you say that love does not envy, you're saying that what they have or possess is of greater value than what you desire to attain. When you say that love does – listen to this – does not keep record of wrong, phew, you talk about selfless, that I'm not going to keep a tally sheet of all that.

You know, when I had the opportunity to talk with couples who are either A., about to get married, or B., they've been married and they're struggling, here is one of the statements that I give them and this work in and outside of marriage: always never use always and never. Think about that. That'll sink in after lunch, I promise. Always never use always and never because when you say, "Well, you always do this and you never do this," what you're doing is keeping record of wrong. You're saying, "I've noticed every time you've messed up but I've never noticed when you've done well. I've noticed every time you're not pleasing to me, but I've never paid attention to when you've given above and beyond."

Why is this significant? Because when Jesus says in John 14:15, "If you love me," he's not speaking of environment, he's not speaking in a context of satisfaction, he's saying, "If you agape me, if you love me selflessly, if I am the primary person and in the primary seat of your life, if you're being selfless, not satisfied, you will keep my commandments."

Now I want to grasp what does that mean "to keep"? I think we have a misunderstanding of what it means to keep. In fact, in our culture, particularly here in the Western world, we naturally gravitate toward performance. If we're going to keep the commandments of God, that means we've got to check off some boxes, we've got to cross some t's, we've got to dot some i's, we've got to make sure that we do everything just a certain way in a certain manner, it's got to have a certain length and a certain time. That's not what the Lord is saying at all. It's not about our performance, it's about our priorities. You see, a relationship with Jesus Christ has never been about performance. I don't know how it could ever be about performance. There is nothing you did to deserve his love. There is nothing you did to deserve his grace or his mercy. So if you didn't do anything to get grace, why would you have to do anything to keep grace and mercy?

It's not based on performance, it's based on priorities. In fact, Jesus, himself, the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 7, there is this profound lesson that he gives us. He says there is coming a day, what we know as the final judgment. He says that the gates or the doors of heaven will eventually finally be closed. He says but there will be those that are standing on the outside, they're knocking on the door and they say, "But Jesus, why don't we get in?" And the statement is made by those individuals who say, "But we prophesied in your name. We cast out demons in your name. We did this in your name. We did that in your name." And Jesus says, "Depart for me, you workers of iniquity, I never knew you." Allow me to give you the new revised 21st century Jeff version of that Scripture, "But Jesus, we sang lots of songs about you. But Jesus, we went to church more times than we didn't. But Jesus, we even gave to Lottie Moon above and beyond our offerings." And Jesus says, "That's fine and that's good but that doesn't earn my favor. That doesn't earn my grace. There is nothing you could do to somehow be in a good position with me. It is for by grace you are saved, not of works, lest any man should boast." So it is grace by which we have a relationship with the Lord, why would it be anything else by which we would sustain, maintain and walk in a relationship with the Lord? When he says, "keep my commandments," do not fall into the trap of performance. Do not fall into the trap, "Well, I did this and I did that and I didn't do this and I didn't do that," because you're going to discover that when you side with performance, you miss out on priorities.

He said, "You, if you love me, keep my commandments." Speaking of priorities, Mark 12. There is a man who comes to Jesus. He's an attorney; he's a lawyer. He's a scribe. He is one who has majored on the details of how to live life. And he comes to Jesus and he makes this statement, he says, "Jesus," he actually asks this question, "What is the most important commandment?" I mean, after all, Jesus right here has said, "If you love me, keep my commandments." This guy has already asked the question for you. Then if that's the case, what are the most important ones? What should be the priority in my life? Jesus responds with this very famous statement, he says, "Love the Lord your God with all of your heart, with all of your souls, with all of your mind, and with all of your strength," and then it says simply, "and then treat your neighbor as yourself. These are the sum of the commandments." In other words, you have to question, then, why did Moses bring down 10? Why was the book of Leviticus ever written? By the way and I'm grateful for those of you who have taken a challenge this year that you're going to read through the Bible in an entire year and I'm glad you're going to do so, I'm just praying you can get to Deuteronomy because, man, Leviticus, it will bog you down.

So you have to ask yourself why the 10 Commandments? Why Moses? Why Mount Sinai? Why the book of Leviticus? Jesus sums it up, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart." What's the first commandment that was on those famous stones that Moses brought down? To have no other god before us. He is to have our entire heart's affection. Our heart's priority should be him primary in our lives.

Love the Lord with all your soul. What was the second commandment? Not to have any idols or graven images. Do not have any mixed affection for the things of this world.

Your heart, your soul, your mind. The third commandment that was on those famous tablets is to not take the Lord's name in vain and, by the way, that's a lot bigger than just using a word that's initials are G and d. It means to speak on behalf of God when he did not speak, and to remain silent on the things of God where he did speak. To love the Lord with all your mind is to vouch for, to stand up for, and to advocate that which the Lord promoted and yet to remain silent on that of which he did not.

Love the Lord your God with all your heart, your soul, your mind – listen to this one – your strength. You say, "Well, how do I love the Lord with all my strength?" Do you know what the fourth commandment was? To obey the Sabbath and keep it holy. You say, "Well, how is that an expose of strength?" Think about the days of the Israelites wandering in the desert, that every morning when they got up there was a box of Krispy Kremes out in the desert. That's how they did it back then. The Lord called it manna, I'll just call it a dozen Krispy Kremes. I mean, the hot button was on every morning. They go out, they grab a box of manna. If they got more than they needed, it would rot by the next day. But on the sixth day, here's what the Lord said, "Get two day's worth. Trust me because tomorrow when you get up, the box isn't going to be out there. You need to trust me that even though it's gone bad for six days, it's not going to go bad on this day."

Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, with all your strength. Did you know that beginning with the fifth and to the end of those famous 10 Commandments it's about our relationship with our parents, it's about our relationship with our wives, it's about a relationship with our neighbors, our employers, our employees, and love each other, treat one another as you would desire to be treated yourself. Do you know what Jesus did in this famous statement? He said, "What is the greatest of the commandments." Do you know what he said? "All of them."

You see, I think sometimes we interpret, "Oh, this one is more important than that one." He says, "No." In fact, James 2:10 says, "If you have broken one of the laws, it's as if you've broken all of them." It's like asking somebody, "Which one is your favorite child?" Well, it's the one in the room with me, of course. No, that's not the answer. It can't be one or more, it's all of them.

Earlier, there's a man by the name of the rich young ruler. That's what we call him. We don't know what his proper name is. There in Mark 10, he comes up to Jesus and he asks this question, now this is all based on performance, he says, "How can I know that I have eternal life? How can I know I'm doing this right? How can I know that the right box has been checked, the t's are crossed and the i's are dotted?" And Jesus says, "What do the commandments say?" Then Jesus continues, "Do not commit adultery. Do not lie. Do not kill," etc. Do you know what the young man says? He says, "I've done all that since my birth. I'm good to go." Jesus says, "Great. Then go and sell everything you've got, give it to the poor, and then you'll inherit the kingdom of heaven." It says that this young man walked away very despondent, very distressed, because he was in great possessions. I think erroneously this passage has been taught that if you want to go to heaven, you'd better give away everything. If that's the case, Hebrews 11 is a lie because in Hebrews 11 it says that Abraham is in heaven. Abraham was wealthy. It says that David is in heaven.

David was wealthy. It says that Solomon is in heaven. Solomon was wealthy. You see, the problem isn't money, the Bible says it's not money that's the root of all evil, it's the love of money that's the root of all evil.

You see, Jesus skipped the first four commandments, to have one God before you, to have no idols, don't take the Lord's name in vain, he went straight to the hard part, how are you treating each other? How are you dealing with your parents? How are you dealing with others? And interesting, when you read that verse in Mark 10:19, Jesus lists five of the six commandments that are directed toward our horizontal relationship with each other. Do you know what the one he left off? Thou shalt not covet. In other words, you should not desire to have something that somebody else has that you don't have or to keep something you have that someone else does not possess.

Do you know what Jesus exposed in his life? And I want you to hear this very clearly: the rich young ruler, just like the scribe later on, thought that out of the 10, if I can get 9, I get an A in the class. I've got news for you: it's not 9 out of 10, it's not 8 out of 10, it's not, "Well, I got a 'passing grade' versus a failing grade." You understand that in God's economy there is no pass/fail, it's Jesus or nothing else. That's what it is.

So when these individuals come and say, "But I did this but I struggled on this." You know, just the other day, my wife Tracy and I were joking and laughing about this and this is within a marriage, this is within a family, this is within friends: isn't it interesting that what you struggle with, your friends or spouse may not? What you find difficult to do, they may find easy. What you find simple to do, what you may not struggle. And how many times have you heard that somebody is struggling in this area or struggling in that area and you say, "Man, I've never struggled with that a day in my life," but what you struggle with they do or don't.

You see, that's the story that we have here when it comes to our performance. We think erroneously that if I do the things I do naturally and easily, well then, God is pleased as punch with me. It's not about performance. He says, "If you love me, keep my commandments." We don't have the ability to say, "Well, guess what, God? I got 9 out of 10. Man, I am a 5 star Christian." He says, "No, it's not about performance, it's about priorities." That's why Jesus said, "Seek first the kingdom of God and all these things will be added unto you." Why did the rich young ruler fail? Why did the scribe fail? Because they saw it from the perspective of what can I do to please God, versus how can I live in a fruitful relationship with the Lord, him being the primary focus of my life.

"If you love me, keep," keep in priority, "my commandments." Now that's a word that in our culture we don't use a whole lot but I kind of wanted to unpack that. I think we have a misunderstanding. I think that we have kind of a wrong definition, shall I say, of what commandments are. I think that somehow we have come to this belief that a commandment of God, a direction of God, the "rules, laws, regulations" of God are somehow his punishment to us. I think we couldn't be more wrong. I don't think the commandments of God are a punishment to or for us as much as they are the protection of us.

Allow me to illustrate. Back to Mount Sinai, back to Moses. I'm sure you know the story. They've come out of captivity, 400 years of slavery. They finally get across the Red Sea. The Egyptians are on one side, they're on the other. As they wander for 40 years because of their lack of faith, because of their disobedience – another sermon, another day – Moses goes up on the mountain for 40 days. When he returns, he has "two tablets" written by the finger of God, what we know as the famous 10 Commandments. Have you ever asked this question, have you ever thought this thought, why those 10? I mean, seriously. There could have been a whole selection, a whole multiple choice of other options. Why does it use those 10 statements. Why weren't there other things. Particularly when you get to the book of Leviticus and you find hundreds and hundreds of specifics, could it be, is it possible that the reason the Lord gave them the 10 that he did is because that was what they were "guilty" of when Moses was on the mountain and they were down in the valley? Do you know what was happening when Moses was on Mount Sinai? Unfortunately, Aaron, his brother, led them. They were forming and fashioning an idol made of gold. Were they worshipping one God and him only? No. Did they form idols? Yes. Were they speaking on behalf of God when he didn't speak? Of course. Were they obeying the Sabbath day? No. Were they honoring their father and their mother? No, because they weren't doing what their father and their mother raised them to do. Were they killing? Yes. Lying? Yes. Adultery? Yes. Covet? Yes.

Interesting. Those 10 Commandments weren't just some random, "Well, I think this is a good idea to kind of collectively guide humanity." Do you know what God was doing? He was saying, "Guys, 40 days, a month and a week, and you've messed it all up. You've messed it all up. All I'm going to do is make it to where you don't have to live a life of bondage anymore. You don't have to live a life that is shackled with the pains and the consequences of poor and bad decision. So based on what I've observed, I'll tell you what, why don't we do these 10, these commandments, and all is going to be good. I'll be your God, you will be my people."

The 10 Commandments weren't the great killjoy from God. In fact, I think sometimes because the Bible speaks of lightnings and thunderings, particularly in this case, that we think somehow God is up in heaven with this lightning bolt of guilt saying, "If you don't do the 'thou shalt nots,' bam, I'm gonna getcha." It's interesting. That's not the picture you get from God. Is he upset? Yes. Is he frustrated? Of course. But you know, he could have just said, "Fine. Do it your way. Enjoy the consequences." What did he do? He again reached out his hand of grace and said, "I'm going to tell you what I'm going to do. I'm going to give you these 10 Commandments, I'm going to give you these 'rules for life,'" and I hate using that term in this context but you understand it, "because I want to protect you. I want to keep your families intact. I want to keep your finances healthy. I want to keep you from having jealousy among each other. I want you to live in community, and more importantly, I want you to live in community and fellowship with me." You see, the 10 Commandments were not the punishment of God, they were the protection of God.

Then you make your way through the famous book of Leviticus and it talks about how we interact with immediate family, extended family; how do we relate to those who we

live in an area with; how do we deal with finances; how do we deal with our children; how do we deal with this; how do we deal with that. In fact, if you read through the book of Leviticus, if you've never read it through, let me challenge you to do so because you're going to read it and in light of what I've said this morning, you're going to think, "They were doing that?" Oh, absolutely. Why would the Lord have to tell them that's not a good idea if they weren't already doing it? God does not plant the ideas of sin in our mind. He is not sitting there going, "Hey, don't do this," and you're going, "Hm, never thought about doing that one." What he was doing is observing their poor decisions, he was observing their erroneous behavior and saying, "Hey, you don't have to live a life like that. I've got something better for you. Why don't you do it this way?" But what do we do? We say, "Well, that's the cosmic killjoy." Let me ask you a question: Adam and Eve, were they doing better or worse before the fig leaf? Think about that for a moment. When they were doing it God's way, everything was great. When they said, "Oh no, we've got this, God," things did not turn out so well, did they?

Back to those famous 10 Commandments just for the sake of time. I want you to think about how God is protecting us and I'll work with them kind of backwards here. When the Lord says, "Do not covet, do not want something that somebody else has that you A., cannot afford, or B., you don't need." Do you know what God is protecting you from? He's protecting you from debt. Yes, that's something we need to hear. He's protecting you from bondage of your finances and working all your day to pay the interest to somebody else because you just had to have something that you couldn't afford. And by the way, most of the time we're buying stuff we don't need to impress people we don't even like. Think about that. When he says, "Don't covet," he's protecting you from all that.

When he says, "Do not commit adultery," he is protecting you from a whole lot of stuff. The wrath of that other man. The wrath of that other woman. The terrible things that happen within the family. The conversations that must be had. The consequences that befall.

When he says, "Do not kill," he's saying, "I don't want you to go to jail. You don't have to live a life of literal bondage." You were designed to have a life of freedom.

When he says, "Honor your mother and father," he says, "I've designed the family to be a unit, not to be separated and divided."

Do you get the idea? These 10 Commandments, when Jesus says, "If you love me, keep my commandments," he is saying that, "If you will put me first, I've got this. I'll take care of you. It's going to look different than what the world says. It's not going to match up exactly with how they present life." But let me ask you a question: how's the world doing? By the way, just speaking of that last item because we're rolling into a new year, "Thou shalt not covet," the whole idea of finances, we have a phrase we use in our culture, keeping up with the Joneses, do you know where the Joneses are? They're in bankruptcy counseling. That's where they are. You see, when we listen to what the world is promoting, we end up with what the world receives.

But you know, it's interesting that the commandments don't begin with parents and finances and marriage, what does it begin with? Thou shalt have only one God before you. You shall have no graven images. God is not just protecting you from the debt counselor, God is not just protecting you from the marriage counselor, God is not just protecting you from the family counselor, let me tell you what he's protecting you from: he's protecting you for an eternity in a place the Bible calls hell. He says you don't have to go there. You don't have to descend there. You can spend forever at a place that the Bible calls heaven.

But yet we say, "Oh, God is such a narrow-minded, bigoted, old-fashioned God. What do you mean it's his way or the highway?" You see, what he's really saying is, "I've got the only way and every other way is the wrong way." You see, he's not punishing us by saying Jesus is the only way. He's not punishing us by saying the Bible is the only truth. He is protecting us from falling into the trap of thinking just like the Israelites in the wilderness and just like most of us in our culture of, "Well, maybe they know what they're doing." Folks, we haven't known what we're doing since the garden of Eden, why would we start now?

"If you love me, keep my commandments." We come today and we sing about, we sing to, we serve, we study about, we read about a God who loves us more than we could ever imagine. He is not seated up in the heavenlies with the lightning bolt of guilt, rather he has sent the Holy Spirit of conviction to show us what sin is, to show us what righteousness is, to show us what judgment is, because more than anything – hear me clearly – he wants you to live a life of freedom. He wants you to live a life of joy and abundance but that only happens when we're doing it his way.

"If you love me, keep my commandments." It's real easy to talk about, it's difficult at times to live and the question we have to ask ourselves when it comes to the things of the Lord: are we all bark or do we have some bite to us?

Let's pray with our heads bowed and our eyes closed. You know, maybe this morning you're that individual who after reading the word of God, hearing the word of God you say, "Do you know what? You're right. I've been doing it my way. I've been drawing my own standard of acceptance. I've been drawing my own line of what is right and what is wrong and what is acceptable and what is not." And maybe today you're that person whether in this room or on the other side of those cameras, maybe you're that individual who realized that your standard is never going to be adequate in God's eyes. Maybe you realize that your standard is never going to be appropriate in his economy and today is that day were you throw your hands up in the air and say, "Okay, God, I quit doing it on my own. I'm going to do it your way." I've got good news for you. You never have to check off another box. You never have to cross another t or dot another i. It's not about religion, it's not about performance, it's about relationship. In fact, the Bible makes it very clear, he says whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.

Maybe that's where you are today. Maybe that's what you desire to do. I've got good news for you. You just need to have a very sincere conversation with the Lord. Because it's not

based on performance, you don't have to say the same words I would say, you don't even have to say it out loud, but maybe your conversation with the Lord would go a little something like this. "God, I just want you to know what you already know about me. I've been doing it my way, according to my standards and according to my levels of acceptance, but I realize today that my standards fall way short of your economy. You've made it very clear, God, that we all, particularly me, have messed up and we've sinned, and I realize the consequences of my sin is death but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. So God, today I want to confess, I believe. I believe that Jesus loved me so much that he was born on my behalf. I believe that Jesus loved me so much that he was willing to live a sinless life on my behalf. I believe that Jesus loved me so much that he was willing to die on a cross for my sins and to raise from the dead so I could be forgiven and I could be saved. God, today I don't have all the answers to all the world's problems but I do know that Jesus is the answer to my sin problem. In the best way I know how, I'm asking you to forgive me, I'm asking you to save me. I just want to turn my life over to you."

With our heads still bowed and our eyes still closed. Maybe that's the conversation you had with the Lord today. We would love to have a conversation with you about it. We'd love the opportunity just to hear what the Lord has been and is doing in your life. Or maybe today the conversation that you need to have with the Lord isn't about initiating a relationship, maybe that took place years ago, decades ago, but maybe you realized that you've fallen into old habits; maybe you've realized you've fallen into old traps and rather than the Lord being a priority, he's become all about performance. Rather than placing the Lord first in your life, you've just allowed him to be a ledger sheet in your life. Maybe today isn't about engaging in a conversation with myself or someone else, maybe today is about walking off of this campus and this premises with the renewed purpose and a renewed focus to place the Lord in his rightful place in your life, the primary place in your life.

Lord, as we come to this time in our service, God, personally I just want to thank you for second chances. You so easily could have left us to our own devices, you so easily could have said, "Alright, I'm done. I put my hands up. I'm wiping clean of them." But rather than punish us, God, you desire to protect us and you've reached down with grace and mercy through the person of Jesus Christ and you've offered us forgiveness, you've offered us the mercy and grace we'll never attain on our own. So God, we thank you for second chances, for third chances and in some cases, lost count number of chances. Lord, I pray today that whatever it is that you've spoken through your word empowered by your Holy Spirit, that it wouldn't be just words off our lips but it would be a life lived therein. It is in the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.

I'm going to ask you to stand with me as our team leads us. If there is a decision to be made, I'll be down here at the front.