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**Sunday 14 May 2023 to Sunday 21 May 2023**

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Sunday 14 May 2023

**An active love for our Lord**

by Craig Heidenreich

***If you love me, keep my commands (John 14:15).***

Read John 14:15–21

One thing that stands out to me as I read John 14 is the number of times Jesus links our love for him to our willingness to obey his commands.

This suggests to me that Jesus wants an active relationship with us, and that we are not to just passively receive.

Jesus is describing a love that goes beyond sentiment alone, a love that cares deeply about what he wants, and obeys him.

Thankfully, Jesus knows how weak we are and promises in verse 16 of our passage to help us by sending the Holy Spirit.

Under the influence of the Spirit, we don’t just ‘do things for’ Jesus – but we abide together.

So, what are these commands of Jesus to us?

We can read about his commands in Scripture. There are plenty of ‘words in red’ that give some clues as to how we are to obey Jesus. In Matthew 22:37 Jesus sums up all of the commandments as loving God and loving our neighbour.

I’d like to suggest that obeying Jesus goes deeper than just obeying principles, and that there are times when he gives me a personal command, that is specific to me.

As we love Jesus, the Holy Spirit reveals his will to us, and then he helps us live it out.

Listening to Jesus and obeying him becomes a daily ‘dance of love’. I’m just amazed that the Lord wants to be our dance partner.

***Thank you, Lord, that you love us and that you promise to show yourself to us. You give great purpose to our lives by including us in your work here on earth. Help us to obey your prompting and join in your great plan to reach the world.***

*Craig enjoys making friends with people from other countries and trying to learn a few words of greeting in their languages. He says it’s fun to see the joy on a person’s face when they hear their mother tongue. When he has some spare time, he's happy renovating the home he and his wife recently purchased in Kapunda, South Australia.*

Monday 15 May 2023

**Encouraging those who labour among us**

by Craig Heidenreich

***Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you (Hebrews 13:17).***

Read Hebrews 13:17–25

Who would choose to be a leader when, so often, the outcome is ‘groaning’? It’s not easy being a leader – in fact, anyone who seeks leadership (for its own sake) probably needs their head read.

People are so different that almost any decision a leader makes will displease someone. True leadership is not a popularity contest – it is a calling to serve.

The concept of obedience and submission to other humans is less accepted today, but one way we can show a supportive attitude is to affirm our leaders.

So, who are these leaders?

When reading a verse like this, we would usually think of our pastors, as they are obvious, visible leaders, but there are various leadership roles that are important for a congregation to function well. Let’s encourage all our leaders.

One of the spiritual gifts mentioned in Romans 12:8 is the gift of encouragement, and we know that encouragement goes a long way. Our determination to be encouraging also keeps the ‘accuser of the brethren’ at bay (Revelation 12:10).

I was once sitting in a church service (just as a congregation member), and as the meeting ended and announcements were about to happen, I suddenly had a ‘prompting’ to go to the front and publicly thank the pastor for his ministry. It felt a bit risky, but the congregation got my drift and spontaneously joined in affirming the pastor (who was obviously very moved).

He later told me privately, ‘In my years of ministry, no-one has ever affirmed me publicly’.

It’s tough being a leader!

Let’s encourage our leaders so there is less ‘groaning’ and more ‘rejoicing’ among us.

***Thank you, Lord, for gifting your body with key leaders who ‘keep watch’ for our welfare. Strengthen them today and bless them in their work. Forgive me, Lord, for times I criticise rather than bless – and show me how I can encourage those around me. Help me to see the moment in every day. Amen.***

Tuesday 16 May 2023

**Giving up our lives for Jesus**

by Craig Heidenreich

***Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus ... (Philemon 1a).***

Read Philemon 1–25

It would be hard to overstate the impact that Paul had in the shaping of the church to reflect the bigger plan of God – the mystery of God’s intention to win every tribe and tongue by sending his Son.

How did this man, so steeped in Judaism and zealous for Israel, shift so dramatically and serve this greater purpose?

I believe the key is in this verse. Paul became a ‘prisoner of Christ Jesus’ – a true ‘bond slave’ (to use the Old Testament image).

To become a prisoner of Christ, Paul gave up all his claims to self-righteousness. He considered his deeds and accomplishments as rubbish – compared with knowing Jesus.

A prisoner of Christ approaches their decision-making in a different way. They put aside their personal feelings to ask, ‘What do you want, Lord?’

Paul is a wonderful example to us when we face various challenges.

Some might conclude that Paul was a man with a strong ‘will’ to obey – I believe his secret probably lay much deeper than that. In 2 Corinthians 12:7, Paul states, 'In my weakness – your strength is revealed’.

Paul learned how to ‘drink in the Holy Spirit’ when faced with difficulty, and this can be our secret as well.

***Lord, I thank you for the heroes of the faith who have gone before us and are now among the ‘great cloud of witnesses’ who barrack us on as we run our race. Help us, Lord, to know you are with us always, and help us run well the race set before us.***

Wednesday 17 May 2023

**A God who cares for all**

by Craig Heidenreich

***Clap your hands, all you nations; shout to God with cries of joy ... God reigns over the nations (Psalm 47:1,8a).***

Read Psalm 47

The children of Israel were called to be God’s chosen people, and sometimes they misunderstood what this meant. They were chosen for a purpose (as are we).

Their purpose was to be ‘priests to the nations’, and the psalmist picks up a sense of this here.

Psalm 47 speaks of God's relationship with all the peoples of the earth and not just the Israelites. Hundreds of years before this psalm was written, God revealed to Abraham his plans saying, ‘All peoples on earth will be blessed through you’ (Genesis 12:2,3).

The Israelites had this call to be a blessing, and now those of us who live in the church era are sent with this message to the nations.

The kingdom of God is near – Jesus is Lord! God reigns over the nations (verse 8).

***Lord Jesus, we live in a time when the nations are coming to us like never before, and many of them are yet to hear about you. Help us to engage them with love and show them how to come close to you. Amen.***

Thursday 18 May 2023

**Power from on high!**

by Craig Heidenreich

***I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high (Luke 24:49).***

Read Luke 24:44–53

In Luke’s account of Jesus' ascension, these are the last recorded words of Jesus, and (for me) this gives his statement a certain gravitas. Jesus' final instruction carries weight.

Shortly before (in John 16:7), Jesus talks to his disciples about how he will shortly be leaving them, and he says, ‘It’s better that I go because then I will send you the Holy Spirit’.

So finally (a few short weeks later), the day has come when Jesus ascends into heaven.

I think if I were one of the disciples that day, I would find it hard to be happy that Jesus has just left, anticipating something better. What can possibly fill the gap left behind now that Jesus is no longer here in person?

This question was answered dramatically ten days later on the day of Pentecost. The promised Spirit comes, and the church is birthed!

Pentecost is celebrated in our Christian calendar as the ‘birthday of the church’, but Pentecost was already a special day in the Jewish calendar. Pentecost was the celebration of the giving of the law on Mt Sinai (fifty days after Passover). Did God choose this day to write the law on our hearts by the power of the Holy Spirit?

Pentecost ushered in a pretty dramatic change for the disciples, and they became people marked by joy and boldness. The same men and women who hid in the upper room (for fear of the Jews) were so filled with joy that they were irrepressible.

So, was the promise that the Spirit was going to clothe them with power from on high just an experience for these early believers?

There has been much debate about this and how we are affected by the Holy Spirit. One thing that is obvious is that we cannot live effectively by our own strength – we certainly need some power from on high.

When Paul talks about being filled with the Spirit in Ephesians, Greek scholars point out the sense that this means to be continually filled. This is not a one-off experience but a daily replenishment. As someone once said, ‘I may be filled with the Spirit, but I have a tendency to leak’. Let’s stay topped up!

***Thank you, Lord, for sending the Spirit to clothe us with power from on high. I need this so much, Lord, and I drink you in today. Help me to live a life pleasing to you!***

Friday 19 May 2023

**Never losing sight of Jesus**

by Craig Heidenreich

***We remember before our God and Father your work produced by faith, your labour prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Thessalonians 1:3).***

Read 1 Thessalonians 1:1–10

You have probably heard the wry comment that ‘Jesus is coming back soon – look busy!’

It is so easy to drift towards being like Martha in our labours and lose sight of the one we love. We can easily get absorbed in all the tasks and lose our joy.

Recently I have been reflecting on the call we have to ‘go into all the world and make disciples’ – and how I sometimes respond by getting on with the ‘task’ as if it is up to me somehow.

How much better it is when I ‘see Jesus’ in my place of labour and ‘do it, as unto him’.

When labour is prompted by love, it is a radically different way to live. So much so that the Thessalonian Christians who found this secret became famous for it.

Lord Jesus, help me see you in my labours today – to see you in the ordinary, ‘least of these’ moments of my day. Help me to ‘lose my life, so that I might find it’ and be marked by joy. Amen.

Saturday 20 May 2023

**Our compassionate God**

by Craig Heidenreich

***A father to the fatherless, a defender of widows, is God in his holy dwelling. God sets the lonely in families, he leads out the prisoners with singing; but the rebellious live in a sun-scorched land (Psalm 68:5,6).***

Read Psalm 68:1–10,32–35

Am I ever glad that we serve a God who is different from other gods? No other religion depicts God in these compassionate terms!

When Jesus launches his ministry in Luke 4, with the following verses, he picks up on this theme: ‘The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised’.

Jesus is saying the core reason he has been sent is to bring reconciliation with God – a God who restores what has been broken.

My wife and I often refer to one of Martin Luther’s quotes, ‘I’m just a beggar, leading another beggar to find bread’.

 As we are restored by Jesus, we can also show compassion to others who are fatherless, lonely and prisoners by being that family to receive them.

***Lord Jesus, help me to see you in my labours today – in the ordinary, ‘least of these’ moments of my day. Help me to ‘lose my life, so that I might find it’ and be marked by joy. Amen.***

Sunday 21 May 2023

**This is eternal life**

by Carolyn Erhlich

***This is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent (John 17:3).***

Read John 17:1–11

Jesus was with his disciples after supper and at a time when his betrayal and arrest were imminent. After declaring to his disciples, ‘In the world you have tribulation but take courage; I have overcome the world’ (John 16:33), the disciples were likely feeling helpless, vulnerable, and uncertain.

At this time, although Jesus was acutely aware of what was about to happen to him, his priority was to pray. He prayed for himself and the success of his mission (John 17:1–13), for the protection of his disciples as they fulfilled their purpose (John 17:13–19), and for the generations of believers who would follow him because of his disciples' ministry (John 17:20–26).

But here, I turn specifically to verse three, where Jesus prays and teaches. He gives us hope and tells us precisely what eternal life is … to know the only true God and Jesus Christ. He prays that we are in relationship with him. This means that eternal life is available here and now, and Jesus’ prayer is that we know a personal relationship with him and our Father.

For those who anticipate that eternal life is something to be granted after our resurrection, knowing that it is available now will be unexpected good news. For some, the question might be how to be in relationship with God here and now. Talk and listen. Talk to Jesus about what you are experiencing. Ask the Holy Spirit to show you what God the Father wants you to know. Talk to Jesus about who you are (even though he is all-knowing). Talk to him about how you are feeling. Talk to him when things are going well. Talk to him when things are not going well. Just as you would talk with your loved ones on earth, talk to Jesus. Say good morning to him. Talk to him about your day. In this way, you will know him – and by knowing him, your eternal life starts now.

For those who already know eternal life and relationship, share your experience with others. Show them what you have experienced. Show them that although they might be lonely, they are never alone. Show them that when they desire deep and meaningful relationships, access to this depth and meaning is available now in relationship with the only true God and Jesus Christ. Show them by your words and actions that eternal life is available to all who accept Jesus as their personal Saviour.

***Father God, thank you that eternal life is a life that is lived in an intimate personal relationship with you. Jesus, thank you for understanding all the thoughts, feelings, anguishes and challenges that come from my humanness because you were simultaneously fully man and fully God. Thank you that I can have a personal relationship with you. To you be the glory, great things you have done. In Jesus' awesome name, I pray. Amen.***

Carolyn Ehrlich lives in retirement with her husband Wayne in Ipswich, Queensland. Before retirement, Carolyn was an academic, working as a researcher in the fields of disability and rehabilitation. Carolyn had also previously worked clinically as a registered nurse. Today, Carolyn keeps busy with hobbies such as patchwork and quilting, supporting the Ipswich Lutheran Parish in various leadership roles, and supporting her family.