

The Rock: 11-15-2020

Series: Abiding love

First reading:

Title: Overcomers

Scripture: 1 John 5:1-5

Theme:

Faith works. The commands of God are not complicated to understand. It is in the doing of them where we discover who really owns our hearts.

Introduction:

As I've said many times in the course of our studies here in 1st John, I get this picture in my mind's eye of an old Grampa tenderly teaching his grandkids the right way to live.

Always starting, as do all of the New Testament writers with what God has done for them and us, and then going into the "what are we to do in this world?", because of what God has done.

I think of this community of believers and your circles of influence and how it is you live each day, growing in Christ, or sometimes avoiding that growth because it's too hard.

I think on the quiet love that so many of you have for those who are in that circle of yours, how it is you "obey the commandments of God" in your day to day efforts to live and act as Jesus taught.

That's God's love, that's discipleship, that's obeying His commandments. A life long journey in becoming disciples of Jesus Christ in this world doesn't begin and end with a one-time decision.

No, it is a life long journey of ups and downs, mess ups and victories. Learning to love and obey what God commands even as we miss the mark.

The Story:

Like many, as we age, at least I hope this is the case, we gain wisdom. We learn to grow and be disciples of Jesus and lovers of our brothers and sisters in Christ most especially.

Along the way, learning to have a passion and a heart for those who do not yet know Christ. Learning too, that He is seen in what we do probably as much as by what we say.

John the apostle, the old Christian man whose heart is in this letter, was the disciple whom Jesus loved. It's not that Jesus didn't love the other's, but for

whatever reason John held a special place in His heart.

He was the brother of James, another one of the "inner three". Fishermen who I suspect had some relation to Peter and Andrew. Peter being the third of Jesus inner circle.

Of all the disciples for Jesus to pick as His confidants, I'm not sure these three would have been the best. Yet given the track record of the group as a whole, I suppose any three would have had issues to work on.

Why is it then, that John is showing his tender heart as a follower of Jesus to this third generation of Christ followers? Because that is what he has been called to as a believer.

Abide, love, overcome. Remember God's love for you in Jesus, watch out for any who try to make Jesus out to be someone he isn't.

Abide. Love. Overcome. When we really get our minds around what God has given us - sinners saved by grace -totally undeserving of His love and care, these are the things that always are in front of us.

They are promised to us and poured out upon us. But even this tender-hearted

old disciple didn't start out this way.
In fact, none of them did.

I am so glad that we mellow with age.
That wisdom and years help us to see
things a bit clearer as we navigate this
world, remembering the lessons of our
youth.

I suspect Peter and John especially
understood this concept. Two of the inner
circle disciples who made glaring
mistakes in their exuberance to "do the
right thing" in their mind.

Along with James, they had such a hard
time getting it right. So, when you think
at times that you can never get it right,
or just as bad, you think you can never
get it wrong -just take some time to
study these men.

"Everyone who believes that Jesus is the
Christ has been born of God, and everyone
who loves the Father loves whoever has
been born of him. By this we know that we
love the children of God, when we love
God and obey his commandments."

-1 John 5:1-2 ESV

I can imagine John listening to his good
friend Peter on that last night Jesus was
with them teaching in the garden:

"Simon Peter said to him, "Lord, where are you going?" Jesus answered him, "Where I am going you cannot follow me now, but you will follow afterward." Peter said to him, "Lord, why can I not follow you now? I will lay down my life for you." Jesus answered, "Will you lay down your life for me? Truly, truly, I say to you, the rooster will not crow till you have denied me three times."

-John 13:36-38 ESV

Oh, here we go again! Peter's mouth is writing checks that the rest of his body can't cash. Always bragging about what he'll do, because he's Peter.

If there was a time to exercise humility, that would have been it, but he never did. Every time Jesus said this is the right way to do something, Peter would be the first to counter that.

Youthful exuberance, trying to obey the law, when the law-giver is standing right in front of you telling you that the heart of the law is: Love God, love your neighbor, tell them why.

But Peter denied him, not once but three times. "I don't even know who this Jesus is! Leave me alone."

Can you imagine the three days of silence for Peter as Jesus lay in that tomb? Not

knowing what would happen, and perhaps even thinking that the last thing he did was to deny he knew his friend, and at His time of need.

Everyone who loves the Father loves whoever has been born of Him. -John tells us. Oh, you see, John too had his issues. Just like Peter, he wasn't free of failure and growth pains.

John had his issues as he learned the commands of Christ and of God, as well as how to apply them "in practice."

He and his brother James give us the very first turn or burn evangelistic crusade, and even then, way back then, we find that Jesus was never very keen of that particular technique.

For those of you with temper issues, myself included, these boys are your friends. Dubbed the "Sons of thunder", this is what they say to Jesus when a Samaritan village decides to reject Jesus:

"When the days drew near for him to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem. And he sent messengers ahead of him, who went and entered a village of the Samaritans, to make preparations for him. But the people did not receive him, because his face was set toward

Jerusalem. And when his disciples James and John saw it, they said, "Lord, do you want us to tell fire to come down from heaven and consume them?"

-Luke 9:51-54 ESV

Uh -no, not today boys. I think we start this whole thing out that way, we are defeating the purpose of loving God, and obeying His commands. That, and if we torched every place that rejected me, there won't be much of anyone left to talk to.

You see, John, just like Peter came to grow in God's love and understood His grace toward them. That understanding didn't happen by accident.

It came from a lifetime of intentional decision making to abide IN HIM. Even when things got tough. It came from making the decision to go toward Jesus when they did something wrong, not run and hide.

"For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome. For everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world."

-1 John 5:3-4a ESV

This is the love of God! By this the world will know - If you have love for one another. How will we know and see that love?

By what we do and how we do it, that's how. Love God love people, do the right things the right way.

Do you remember a few weeks back we talked about how the Pharisees got the letter of the law when we found them doing the easy stuff, tithing dill. cummin, and mint?

Yet they rejected the heart -justice - mercy -faithfulness. This actually becomes a bit scary if we look back in Matthew at the beatitudes and the comment Jesus made there about these pharisees:

"For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven."

-Matthew 5:20 ESV

So, it wasn't that the Pharisees were wrong, they were right actually. Yet they were missing the part that John talks about here -loving the children of God. The heart of the Law!

That is what makes following His commands "not burdensome". The heart of the Law -

being a follower of Jesus is as much about being, as it is about doing.

Our "doing", that obeying the commandments, is born out of our abiding with God and loving Him and His people.

Sometimes a passage like this here in John can cause confusion because it sounds so much like "works" and so little like "grace".

The commands of God were never meant to be a burden for His people, but rather they were to serve as a guide, a signpost that pointed to Him and His love and care for us.

Doing the right thing for others ultimately honors God. Jesus fulfilled the Law. He obeyed every part of it and gave His life for us as the perfect sacrifice of Love.

John is looking back at that for us and telling us that there is joy to be found in obedience to His commands. That there is nothing restrictive, nothing condemning and nothing burdensome about that.

You see, Moses came down from Mt. Sinai with two tablets and ten commandments. Words actually in Hebrew, but ten, none the less.

Over time, the scribes and teachers of the law turned those ten into, as near as we can tell 612. Thus, helping us understand in no uncertain terms what, in the words of the five-man electrical band sang, "do this, don't do that" can't you read the signs -really means.

It is amazing, isn't it how the human heart can always find some question, some qualifier as to why something that is a "don't do", can actually turn into an ok thing "to do."

We always work at justifying our sin, our proclivities and our desires. But John will have none of that here.

No, following God's commands is not burdensome! Do what is right and you will be alright. Do what is wrong and you won't.

But just what are the commands? Because 612 from ten sounds an awful lot like a government operation! Overcomplicating the simple is a gift many of us have.

Jesus makes it simple for us:

"But when the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together. And one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him.

"Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?" And he said to him, "You

shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets."

-Matthew 22:34-40 ESV

Notice that it's always the Pharisees who ask. Right question -always. Wrong heart -always. If they had just listened to what he said instead of just hearing the words.

Again, Jesus makes it simple: ten plus 612 = Two in the heart of God -and this is why John says these things are not a burden.

In John's Gospel, chapter 15, a place we have gone a couple times already in this letter. See, John isn't the only one who repeats himself.

"If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full. "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you."

-John 15:10-12 ESV

It would be nice if Jesus had stopped right there, but he didn't, and this is often the place where we struggle:

"Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you."

-John 15:13-14 ESV

Don't think for a moment that John has ever forgotten those words. Jesus laid down his life for His friends.

The very friends who abandoned Him. Left Him alone, who denied Him, who wanted to "call fire down from heaven" to destroy people.

He loved them. He loved John. He loves you and me. If that be the case, why in Heaven's name wouldn't we do what He says?

Love one another, obey His commands. Love God, love your neighbor, love each other. So simple, yet so very hard.

"Tell us what that looks like Jesus. Is it ok to heal on the Sabbath Jesus? Should I help my neighbor, who I really don't like. What about that person whose life style isn't in line with your teachings Jesus, what about them?"

Listen, my children, my friends, you have overcome because Jesus overcame. This is the victory:

"And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith. Who is it that overcomes the world except the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?"

-1 John 4b-5 ESV

Just a sinner saved by grace-through faith.

The one who believes in Jesus. Not just as a good moral teacher and nice guy. But the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God and saved him from an eternity of separation from God the Father.

Gnostic teachers, atheist people and other religious teachers, you are put on notice right here. Our faith as overcomers is rooted in the Biblical truth that Jesus of Nazareth IS the Son of God.

The second person of the trinity, God in the flesh. He came into the world to save His own. If you do not believe this -that is the line in the sand -you are not a Christian.

John does a lot of things in his writings, but muddying the waters as it

relates to Jesus is not one of those things.

As we come into the Christmas season, we will look at, "Bringing in the Kingdom". What it means when God in Heaven steps into our time in the person, the little baby Jesus.

God in the manger, this one John has been teaching us about these past months. The one through whom we are overcomers by our faith.

That is seen in what we do with that faith as we seek to honor God and pay it forward to those whom He has called into His marvelous light.

It is all about Jesus -from the cradle to the grave. What will you do with this man? For your belief always impacts your actions. Do not ever think otherwise.

Will you receive the victory that has overcome this world?