

“Obey the Word of God”

John 14:15:21

Sermon Notes/Life Group Questions

A moment of decision. When Ellen and I were first married, she didn't yet know how to read a road map. And so when as newlyweds we were sent to Ft. Riley, KS for my/our first assignment, she was not yet ready to be our navigator as we drove west on the interstates. That year we were driving home for Christmas, and trying to drive straight through from Kansas to Buffalo. I had driven as far as I could and Ellen offered to drive so that I could get some rest. I don't remember the exact time except that it was O-dark thirty – very early in the morning. I was asleep in the passenger seat and I felt Ellen's arm and heard her voice trying to awaken me. She was fighting tears as she tried to explain to my sleepy ears that we were doing loops around the Indianapolis Airport. She missed a turn and couldn't figure out how to get out of the airport complex. Let me tell you now though, you can put a wilderness map in front of her and she can take you anywhere you want to go – in and out of the mountains.

Have you ever come up to an intersection and not known which way to turn? Do I turn right or left, or go straight ahead? Do you remember facing one of life's momentous decisions? Perhaps it involved a job change, and maybe one that came with a relocation? There are all kinds of examples. Life is full of critical moments when we need to make a decision. And even when we try to avoid a decision or to put off a decision, we have in fact just made a decision.

Individuals and families are not the only ones faced with moments of decision. It is also true for churches. I believe that the Lord is bringing the Deer Flat family to a moment of decision. When we come to a fork in the road, we need to consider our choices.

First we can say that we don't really like where we are. We can try to get things turned around so that we can go back to a place we enjoyed in the past. Sometimes the good old

days do have a comfortable appeal. All of this change ... if only we could turn back the clock and go back to what we once knew and enjoyed. That is always an option. I think though that we should consider the story of God's people. God was leading them from slavery in Egypt and though they were in the wilderness they were on the way to the Promised Land. A land so blessed that the Bible described it by saying that it flowed with "milk and honey". As amazing as it seems, God's people began to grumble and complain and ask to go back to slavery in Egypt rather than pressing forward to the Promised Land. Going backwards to what they remembered was not a good choice for them because it took them in the wrong direction. It took them away from what God had prepared for them.

A second choice is that we can say that we really like it just the way things are now. We can look around and say to ourselves ... "well, this is sure better than where we used to be. Why we have awesome youth and children's programs. We have this incredibly large building that can be seen for miles around. We have an abundance of friends that worship with us. I love my Life Group and my Sunday Class. What more can we ask for? No, we don't want to go backwards but let's just try to keep things as they are. These are the good old days". This is indeed a choice. We can try to slow things down and enjoy what we have. Again, I think that we should consider what happened to God's people when they chose to stop while He was still leading them forward. When God is calling His people to be pioneers it is no time to be taking the wheels off the wagons. And even when God's people arrive at the place where God wants them to live and love and serve, I think it pleases God if they maintain the "pioneering spirit". You know – the spirit that believes that God still answers prayer; that God provides for His people; that God still has a divine purpose to be fulfilled for His Kingdom; that there are more that still need and want to be more like Jesus.

A third choice is to listen for the voice of the Lord. What is God saying? Where is God leading us? And if we hear the voice of God and if He is calling us forward, then we have no choice but to be obedient. When God is speaking, His people must continue to walk by faith.

Now ... is God speaking? Can the voice of God be heard? What is it that God is saying to us? As Ellen and I were preparing to come here to serve as your Lead Pastor, I had some wonderful times in prayer with the Lord. I was asking the Lord to prepare my heart. I was asking the Lord to teach me who the Deer Flat Church was and why we were here. Some nights the Lord would awaken me from my sleep and give me insights. Some nights I felt as if the Lord was giving me so much that I had to turn on the light and grab paper and pen and start writing so that I wouldn't forget all of it. This sermon series that I have been following since August was given to me by the Lord in one of those nights when God woke me up. The Lord began to give me verses that I believe were His renewed promises for the Deer Flat family. As I arrived and began to share those verses publicly and privately, people began to come to me and say that they believed that the Lord had also given them these same verses for our church. In so many ways, the Lord confirmed to me that He indeed was speaking – not just to me – but to our Deer Flat family.

One of those verses is God's renewed promise of Fruit and Joy from John 15? We believe that God is extending a promise that this will again be a place of great joy? We believe that we will learn again what it means to be a transformational community? That through our relationships with one another and with our neighbor lives will be radically transformed by His grace. Another verse came out of Isaiah 54 where the Lord is telling us to enlarge our tent. We believe that God is calling us to make room for more of Him. I know you have heard me say this already, but may I say it again? – our heart is not to be the first, the biggest or the best. Our heart is to be like Jesus. We believe that the Lord is renewing His call to us to enlarge our tent so that we can make room for more of Him. We have a promise from God and we don't have to chase after numbers simply trying to attract a large crowd. We don't have to submit to self-imposed pressure to try to be like other churches in other places. And we don't have to copy someone else's blessing. The voice of the Lord is speaking to the Deer Flat family again saying that if we remember who we are and why we are here that He will add to the church those that are being saved.

Friends, I look around and smile. I thank God for His tremendous blessings on the Deer Flat family. I praise God for His awesome blessings upon our past and our present. We have been blessed with some great pastoral leadership. This past week Pastor Kay Cole was back in Caldwell to preside at the memorial service for Jim Prideaux. Kay and Ruth are welcome back at any time and to be honest I would love for them to move back to Caldwell and rejoin their Deer Flat family. And as a church we want to give honor to Pastor Jim and Lois McMillan for their faithful service. Pastor Jim is still involved in ministry and he doesn't need my or our permission. We trust Pastor Jim to minister as an ongoing part of our Deer Flat family and as the Lord prompts his heart. Yes, I look around and smile at the blessings of God upon us for our past and present.

But I confess to you as your Lead Pastor, that I believe God is still speaking to us today. We can be thankful and grateful for what He has blessed us with, but I don't think God wants us to take the wheels off the wagons just yet. I believe that God is still calling us forward. He wants us to be carried along by His Spirit. God wants us to keep the pioneering spirit alive. God is calling us to enlarge our tent to make room for more of Him. God wants us to seek after His promise of Fruit and Joy.

This may be a moment of decision for us. But as we come to the crossroads, I believe God is calling us to keep the wheels on the wagons and to keep the wagons rolling forward. We will be carried along in prayer allowing us to keep in step with the Spirit of God. God is pleased as we remain faithful to who we are and to why we are here.

The heart of the Deer Flat family is the simple desire to be like Jesus and help others be like Jesus. How is that happening? If we want to be like Jesus we must listen to and then obey the words of Jesus. Jesus is calling us to "Go, to Love God and Neighbor, Making Disciples".

And what happens as we Go? God will use our relationships to build a sense of community where lives are radically transformed by His grace. And as we "Go, Loving

God and Neighbor, Making Disciples” there are three things that happen. Our love for God and our neighbor will introduce the Kingdom of God to a watching world. Our loving relationships create transformational community that reflects the Glory of God. And all of this happens as we are obedient to the Word of God.

Whew – all of that was free. All of that to get to what I really want to give you from the Lord this morning. Are you ready?

Let’s ask ourselves what happens when God’s people are obedient to His Word?

First, we need to understand the power in the word of God. We need to understand the power in the Word of God. The Word of God is simply awesome. It is the Word of God. Whether it is the red letters with the words of Jesus, or the black letters it is the inspired Word of God. Paul wrote that “All scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness” (2 Timothy 3:16). Jesus said that “Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the very mouth of God” (Matthew 4:4).

Second, we believe that everything we need for salvation is found in the Bible. We believe that everything needed for salvation is found in the Bible. We believe in the Word of God. My sermons will not come from self-help books or be downloaded from the internet but will come from the Word of God. We will study the Word of God together in our Sunday classes and in our Life Groups. We will build a healthy biblical community here in the Deer Flat family based on the Word of God. We will teach the Word of God to our children and grandchildren. We will grow our families and our friendships based on the Word of God. We will face our fears and share our faith based on the Word of God. We will build our lives and seek to change our world based on the Word of God.

Let me add a note here – some have graciously asked that the Bible verses be places on the overhead screens as I am preaching. I do understand, and I thank each of you who

have made this suggestion to me in person or in writing. Your spirits were gracious and very appropriate. But ... I ask you to hear my heart. We will put the verses up on the screen from time to time, but what I want is for each of us to grow in our ability to find our way around and through the Bible. I want us to bring our Bible with us to church, and if you know of a friend that doesn't have one just let us know and your Deer Flat family would love to give them one. The Word of God is like a roadmap for life and each of us need to know how to read His roadmap. We need to be able to find our way around and through the Bible. Psalms 119:105 says that the Word of God is a lamp for our feet and a light for our path.

Third, the primary benefit of the Bible is that it reveals Jesus to us. The primary benefit of the Bible is that it reveals Jesus to us. The most common way for us to be like Jesus is to read the stories of Jesus found in the Bible. We miss out if we only read the Bible out of duty and obligation. When we read the Bible we can see Jesus, we can better hear His voice, and can grow to become more like Him. If we want to hear the voice of God on a regular basis, then we need to be intimately acquainted with the Word of God.

And fourth, the people who become the most like Jesus are the ones who meditate on the Word of God. The people who become the most like Jesus are the ones who meditate on the Word of God. As we read and reflect on the Bible, the Holy Spirit nourishes our minds and washes our hearts. A little Bible reading really doesn't change us. It is the daily discipline of listening to the voice of God as we read His Word day after day, week after week, month after month, and year after year that begins to truly transform us into the likeness of Jesus. Husbands and wives can sit down together over a meal or coffee and have a conversation and never hear or remember what the other was saying to them. I have followed a plan that allows me to read through the Bible each year for the last sixteen years. But just as Ellen can be talking to me and I am not even listening to her, I can also read the Bible and not even hear the voice of God as He is speaking to me. I can mechanically run my eyes across the lines and down the pages and have no comprehension of what it is that I am reading.

One of the words used to describe our daily quiet time in prayer and in the Word of God is called “devotions”. If you are finding that your devotions are lacking, maybe the need is in your devotion to Jesus. When Ellen sees that I am sitting across from her and that my eyes are locked into her eyes and that I am actively listening, then she begins to open up and let me see into her heart. So it is with God ... when He sees us looking for His face and waiting joyfully in His presence then He begins to let me see into His heart.

Let's go back to our text that we read earlier in the service. John 14:15-21. (Read).

Let's begin with verses 15 and 21. In both of these verses we read that we cannot be like Jesus until and unless we love Jesus. But we cannot love Jesus without obeying Him. Yes, we want to be like Jesus. Then we need to hear Jesus as He tells us that we cannot love Him unless we also obey Him. Again, it can be like a marriage. If I know what brings joy to Ellen and give that no regard in our relationship then Ellen may begin to wonder about the depth and strength of my love for her. The opposite is true – if I know what brings sorrow to Ellen and give that no regard then Ellen may begin to wonder about the depth and strength of my love for her.

I may have used this illustration before. I grew up the oldest of five children. My next two younger siblings were brothers. The three of us were four years apart. One of our favorite television shows was The Three Stooges. We had a great time reenacting our heroes. But when I met Ellen I found out that she did not want to become the Fourth Stooge. She thought three was more than enough.

Another example – I have at times been known to be a somewhat competitive. In my younger years, it would sometimes show up in my driving. If someone was trying to cut into my space I would demonstrate that this was my space and not their space, if you know what I mean. One day I vividly remember Ellen saying to me from the passenger seat in a soft gentle way, “I really don't like that side of you. I don't like it when you drive that way.” “Shot through the heart, and you're to blame. You give love a bad name.”

If I tell Ellen that I love her but I don't live in such a way that I respect and honor those things that either give her joy or sorrow then she has reason to wonder if I love her. It is the same with Jesus – if we love Him we will obey Him.

Verses 16-20 tell the story of Jesus ... in me? Imagine the possibility. To understand this as more than just a possibility, let's look more deeply into these verses. Jesus was about to leave this earth and His disciples. Jesus asked God the Father to send another comforter – the Holy Spirit. Jesus said that this would be a Spirit of truth. Jesus said that the world would not be able to see or know or accept the Holy Spirit. But Jesus said that we would know the Holy Spirit, because the Spirit of God will be in us and live with us.

We read in verse 18 that we will never be orphaned by Jesus; He will come to us through His Holy Spirit. We have His promise – when the world no longer sees Jesus, we will see Jesus. And where is all of this leading? Because Jesus lives, we too will live! The life that Jesus promises is not simply an earthly existence where we struggle to get by. This is a promise of being like Jesus in this life and then being with Jesus for the rest of time. It is not simply getting by, but life with abundant joy and lasting fruit. And when all of this is happening, verse 20 tells us that Jesus is in God the Father, we are in Jesus, and Jesus is in us. The Apostle Paul understood this when he spoke of Christ being in us as the hope of glory (Colossians 1:27). Wow – how is it that we can become more like Jesus? Well ... because as we love Jesus and as we obey Jesus, His presence within us only grows.

This brings me to our last verse for this morning. Verse 21 – the promise of Jesus. God's love for us is unconditional. God never stops loving us. Nothing can separate us from His love. But the Bible says that God's presence and power with and within us is conditional. It works like this - if we have God's commands and obey them, we show Jesus that we love Him. And Jesus said that if we show our love for Him, we will then be loved by God the Father. And as we are loved by God the Father, we will be loved by

Jesus. And out of Jesus' love for us, He will show Himself to us. Amazing – Jesus promises to show Himself to us.

Have you seen Jesus lately? No, I don't mean to ask if you have seen his physical body. But have you sensed His presence with you? Have you heard His voice? No I don't mean have you heard him speak to you in an audible way as you hear me speaking now. But are you having those moments when God is speaking to you? It happens as we read His Word and as we almost savor it taking it in slowly. It happens as we spend our day thinking about what it is that we read in the Bible that morning. When we ask God what it is that He wants to say to us out of His Word. When we ask God what it is that he wants us to do in obedience to His Word. And the more we show God that we are willing to get alone and be still in His presence the more we hear His voice. And the more that we show God that we are willing to act on and obey what He says to us, the more that He will reveal to us.

You see there is no fast food drive through entrance to the power and the presence of God. To be like Jesus we have to love His Words and His voice. The relationships where you have a depth of friendship are the ones where you have not only given quality time, but a quantity of time. The deep and meaningful friendships that we all need require time spent in community with one another. Do you want that kind of depth in your relationship with Jesus? He is offering it to all of us, but it requires that we take time to be with Him. We must take time to listen for His voice as we read His Word.

My last word for you this morning as a part of this message ... as we become more like Jesus, as we become a people of the Word of God, as we live in joyful obedience to the Word of God ... "God things" begin to happen in our lives and in the Deer Flat family. What are "God things"? These are the good things that happen that are beyond our ability to manipulate and manufacture. These are the answers to prayer when the need or the pain was so great that only God Himself could answer that prayer. "God things" begin to happen ... it is a sense of peace that God gives you when you are in the midst of one of life's storms. It is a sense of joy that God gives you when the world around you is

full of anxiety and conflict. It is a sense of an ever increasing presence of God in your life as you develop your spiritual muscles that come from times of obedience. It is when God is acting on our behalf sometimes even before we know of our need. “God things” are unleashed in our life as we live in obedience to Jesus and His Words.

Friends, this is to live for. This is something that we can give our lives for. Yes, we can be more like Jesus. And it is a promise to each of us and all of us. We need to know the Word of God. We need to listen to the voice of God. And then as we obey, Jesus becomes increasingly alive within us. And as we become more like Jesus, then we begin to see “God things” – God at work in our lives and relationships and in our families and in our neighborhoods and communities. Know His Word, Listen for His voice. Obey Jesus as He speaks. And watch for the “God things” that begin to happen.