October 15, 2023

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THE PROOF IS IN THE PUDDING

John 14:15-27

Last year CNN carried a story about well known and highly respected French physicist Etienne Klein. He had posted a photograph on his Twitter account that he said was taken by the James Webb Space Telescope, which is orbiting the earth and has been providing remarkable photos of distant objects in space. This particular photo carried the caption, “Proxima Centauri, the nearest star to the sun. Located 4.2 light years away from us.” It also mentioned the amazing level of detail revealed by the picture. It showed a reddish orange orb with speckles of orange and white. However, later Klein would admit in subsequent posts that in fact it was not a photo of Proxima Centauri taken by the space telescope. It was actually a close up photo of a slice of chorizo. He said, “According to current cosmology no object related to Spanish food exists anywhere else other than on Earth.” He explained that he pulled this hoax because he wanted to caution people about taking internet photographs at face value.

Thus ended the intriguing story of the space chorizo. The incident raises the increasingly difficult question of what we can trust is real. I remember a TV commercial from years ago in which at one point an obviously gullible young woman says to her friend, “They couldn’t put it on the Internet if it wasn’t true.” If nothing else, the pandemic of 2020 put that silly idea to rest for good. With increasingly advanced technology we have gotten to the place where we can’t even trust our own eyes. Laurie and I got an example of this when we recently watched the most recent Indiana Jones movie on television. There before our eyes was Harrison Ford looking just like he did when he starred in the original films 40 years ago. The dude is 81 years old and in the early scenes of the movie he looks like a man in his 40’s. I’d like to have his makeup person. It's not makeup. It’s film magic and it’s not real.

There are a lot of people who claim to be followers of Jesus. But are they the genuine article? Petra Reski is an investigative journalist and a leading expert on the Italian mafia. In her book, *The Honored Society*, she revealed that faith in God is common among mafia members. On mafioso, Marcello Fava, said, “Before I had to kill someone I would cross myself and say, ‘Dear God, stand by me.’” One mafia boss, Bernardo Provenzano was found to have several Bibles in his home with his comments written in margins and passages underlined. He had many statues of Christ in the house all with an inscription, “Jesus, I put my trust in you.” Um, doesn’t something seem a little off about that? What is real? Who is really a follower of Jesus? Jesus addressed that question in John 14:15-27.

FOLLOWING JESUS REQUIRES DOING WHAT HE SAYS

That statement might seem obvious, but it is common for people to claim to be Jesus followers who don’t actually live as he said we should. That mafia guy was supposedly killing people while trusting Jesus. That clearly is way out of bounds. None of us is perfect. None of us always does what Jesus says we should do. However, there is a basic commitment to letting Jesus’ commands rule over our lives that we all need to make if we are going to legitimately claim to follow him. To follow him is to heed what he says.

In verse 15 Jesus said, “If you love me, keep my commands.” In verse 21 he said, “Whoever has my commands and keeps them is the one who loves me.” In verse 23 he said, “Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching.” Again in verse 24 he said, “Anyone who does not love me will not obey my teaching.”

There was a day years ago where Laurie was stressed about some things going on. She was not her usual effervescent self that morning, and I knew it was because she was thinking about the issues that were bothering her. When I came into the kitchen that morning she said, “We’re going to have cereal for breakfast. Do you want Raisin Bran or Frosted Mini Wheats?” I briefly considered that, then said, “I’d like the Mini Wheats.” She didn’t say anything, but shortly she put on the table in front of me a bowl of Raisin Bran. I said, “Or, I guess I could have Raisin Bran instead.” I realized that she was not saying, “I don’t care what you want, I’m giving you this.” That happened because she was distracted and probably didn’t even register what I said to her. But what if she had heard it and said, “I don’t care what you want. You’re getting Raisin Bran?”

Laurie would never do something like that, because she loves me. Iseems obvious that if you love someone you will do what they want you to do, yet Jesus felt it necessary to not just state that point, but to say it repeatedly, because he knew we somehow would be prone to miss it. It is not too hard to understand why Jesus needed to drive this point home to his disciples. They had lived all their lives respecting the Pharisees and their interpretation of the Law of Moses. They had been ruled by the theology and the way of thinking of that group. What Jesus taught was radically different than all that they had known. They were going to have to have a new way of thinking and living if they were to follow Jesus. He was making that point to them. They couldn’t love and follow Jesus while also trying to hold on to the old thinking of the Pharisees. This, in fact, would become the first major issue that the early church had to work through. They had to decide they were going to follow Jesus, live and think as he said, or would they stick with what they had always known and done.

We have ways of thinking that are deeply ingrained in us. They are old covenant ways. The question is, will we live by what Jesus taught and the implications of what he did for us, or will we let ourselves be ruled by those old ways of thinking? Will we be ruled by our own fallen nature, by what Paul called the flesh, which Paul said in Romans 8:7 is actually hostile to God and cannot submit to his commands?

There is a saying we sometimes use that is a cliché. It is, “the proof is in the pudding.” What in the world does that mean? What does pudding have to do with anything? I can’t even remember the last time I ate pudding, though I actually like it. The meaning basically is you only find out how good pudding is by tasting it. It applies in this case meaning you only find out if someone actually follows Jesus by seeing it lived out in obedience to him.

This is where we run into problems. What we intend and what we say doesn’t always match up with what we do. For instance, The Global Wellness Institute released a report that said Americans spend over $260 billion a year on clothes, equipment and classes for physical activity, far more than any other nation. This is true in every segment of the fitness industry. Yet the British medical journal the *Lancet*, reports that we rank 143rd out of all nations for physical activity. We are first, by far, in buying all the stuff, all the clothes and gear for being active and fit, we just don’t do it. The proof is in the pudding.

Jesus had a lot to say about what we worship, what our priorities should be, about loving people, about forgiving people, about how to handle our money, about our sexuality, and just about every other aspect of life. The question is, are we going to do what he says, or are we going to do whatever we think is going to be for our own good? The proof is in the pudding. **My way or Jesus’ way?** That’s the question every human being faces every day on the planet.

This could be a big guilt producer for us because, as I said, we aren’t perfect. All of us fail at times to do exactly what Jesus commands us to do. How are we to think about that? In his commentary on John, Rodney Whitacre wrote, “The commands of Jesus are not a set of rules like traffic codes, they are a description of a pattern of life that reflects God’s own life transposed into human circumstances.” It starts with the heart. Do we approach all of life with attitude that Jesus is Lord of all that we are and do? Do we let him determine what we choose, who we are, and how we live?

DOING WHAT JESUS SAYS IS A RESULT

Judas, not the traitor, but another one who most scholars think is also called Thaddeus, asked a reasonable question in verse 22. Jesus had talked about how the world didn’t know who he was in verses 17-21. So the good Judas asked, “Why are you going to show yourself to us and not to the world?” I wonder the same thing sometimes. Why doesn’t he just do something amazing and undeniable for all the world to see?

Jesus answered in verse 23, “Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching. My Father will love them and we will come to them and make our abode with them.” Sometimes I think Jesus would have made a great politician because he had a penchant for answering a question in a way that almost seems like he’s avoiding it. It doesn’t seem like Jesus actually answered Judas’ question, but went on talking about what he had been saying as though the question had never even been asked.

Is that what Jesus did? Was this his way of saying, “Let’s not get sidetracked here, boys. Try to stay on subject”? I think there is an element of that in the way he responded, but I also think Jesus did answer the question, albeit in a somewhat oblique way. This should not surprise us, because Jesus was the master of the oblique answer. Verse 24 gives us a clue to how Jesus’ response answered Judas’ question. “Anyone who does not love me will not obey my teaching.” He could have tacked on to the end of that sentence, “No matter what I do or say.” In other words, Jesus meant that he had done more than enough to convince people who he was. That’s why the guys who were there that night were following him. They had seen and been convinced, and so they loved Jesus and followed him. Many other people had seen and heard the same things, but they did not love Jesus and did not obey his teaching.

In other words, Jesus was saying everyone has seen enough, but some love me and most don’t. So Jesus was telling the disciples, “You do love me, so know that the Father loves you, and now do what I have been teaching you to do. I’m not worried about the others because they have already shown they will not believe no matter what.” If I showed them a lot more miraculous stuff it wouldn’t make any difference.

There is a possible misinterpretation that comes in when we think about that statement that the Father will love those who obey Jesus’ teaching. That sounds like he’s saying being loved by the Father is dependent on obeying Jesus’ teaching. In other words, we have to earn the Father’s love by doing what Jesus tells us to do. There is a sense in which this is true. Jesus’ most consistent command was to believe in him. He had just commanded them at the beginning of chapter 14 to believe in him. One of the clearest examples of this is in John 6:29. In verse 28 the people in Jesus’ audience, after hearing about having eternal life, asked, “What must we do to do the work God requires?” Jesus responded in verse 29, “The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent.”

So in that sense, yes, the Father will love those who obey that command, who believe in Jesus. But it is also crucial that we pay attention to what Jesus says at the very beginning of this section. “If you love me, keep my commandments.” Which came first, loving him or keeping his commandments? I know some might say that’s a sort of “which came first, the chicken or the egg” type question. But I have a theory on that. It had to be the chicken. Someone had to sit on the egg so it would hatch, thus chicken first. Plus, that appears to be how God created things. He didn’t make Adam an embryo or a baby. He arrived on the scene as instant human. Just add water.

Uh, maybe not the point, Rick. No it isn’t. This question is not merely an academic exercise. It has enormous implications. Jesus said loving him came first, and the effect of loving him will be obeying his commands. We love Jesus because we believe in him. The Father loves us because we believe in Jesus and thus love him. He doesn’t love us because we are so good at obeying Jesus’ commands. The problem for us is if we ever get that out of order, we start to think we have to do better at obeying Jesus’ commands to get the Father to love us. And when we do that all sorts of trouble begins.

Paul wrote the book of Galatians and much of Romans to keep us from falling into that trap. It is a trap that always ends with spiritual death masquerading as righteousness. This is hard for us because that kind of thinking is how the world works. It is how fallen human nature works. You are loved and valued only if you deserve it. We all know this because we’ve experienced it everywhere. When you played kid sports you learned early on the best players got all the attention and acclaim. The rest, well, they got participation trophies and not much else. And so it was in school, in jobs, in relationships, even in families. It makes no sense to us that the Father would love us just because we believe and thus love Jesus and for no other reason. But that is the good news of Jesus. Anyone can do that, and Jesus came so that anyone could enter into his kingdom.

I’m making a point of this because what we need to emphasize is loving Jesus. Believe in him and revel in his grace and love for us. When we do this the effect will be that we want to obey his commands. If we don’t believe and don’t love him, we won’t do it. That’s what Jesus said.

Laurie and I both love the old classic movie, *The Princess Bride*. We often quote lines from it. “Have fun storming the castle.” “I do not think that word means what you think it means.” “No more rhyming, I mean it. Anybody want a peanut?” “Never go against a Sicilian when death is on the line.” Early in the movie Princess Buttercup torments Wesley, the young man who works on her family’s farm. She orders him around mercilessly, calling him “Farm Boy.” But Wesley loves her, so no matter what she tells him to do or how she says it, he only responds. “As you wish.” Because he loved her he would do anything for her. That is what Jesus was saying our relationship with him should be like. If we love him, we will always say, “As you wish.” So focus on loving him, enjoying who Jesus is, being thankful for his love and his presence with you. If we do that we will want to obey his commands. But Jesus knew that would not be easy in a world opposed to him and his way. So he has given us some help.

JESUS HAS GIVEN HIS SPIRIT TO HELP US

In verse 16 Jesus said, “I will ask the Father and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever.” Jesus said he would give assistance in the form of an advocate. The Greek word was *parakletos*. That term has been taken directly into English and comes out as paraclete. Wait, what about a parakeet and how will a bird help? No, not parakeet, paraclete. Um, he’s going to give us a pair of cleats? Still not getting it. Not a pair of cleats, just “paraclete.”

The Greek term literally meant one called alongside. It was used mostly in that day to mean a lawyer, who comes alongside and helps in court. The NIV translation reflected that in rendering it “advocate.” It meant one coming alongside to speak for us and advocate our cause. Wait, you’re saying that Jesus said he would help by giving us a *lawyer?* You can insert your favorite lawyer joke here. Why did lab scientists start using lawyers instead of rats in experiments? Because they found they sometimes got attached to the rats, but didn’t have that problem with the lawyers.

Ah, poor lawyers. I’m sure they grow weary of the ridicule. But honestly how could having a lawyer help with obeying Jesus’ sometimes difficult commands? It won’t. The word used here was not exclusively used to mean a lawyer. The verb form of *parakletos* was *parakaleo.* It meant to encourage, to bolster, strengthen, stand with someone. That’s how Jesus intended this word. We know that because he said this “advocate” would “help you and be with you forever.” He’s going to be with you to comfort you, encourage you, guide you and strengthen you as you go through life.

Great, who is this advocate? Note that he said this will be “another” advocate. They already have one, now they, and we, will get another. Well who is this? There are some indications who Jesus meant. The first comes from the term “another.” In Greek there were two words for another. One meant “another of a different kind” and the other meant “another of the same kind.” That second one is the term used here. So Jesus meant they already had a “paraclete” and now they were going to get another one that was like the first.

Jesus revealed what he meant in verse 17. “You know him, for he lives with you and will be in you.” In other words, it was Jesus. That’s why he said in verse 18, “I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you.” He is the advocate who will come, and this time he won’t just be with his followers like he was with the disciples at that time. He claimed he would actually be *in* them. Jesus said he was not going to abandon his followers. Though he would be physically absent from them, he would put his spirit inside them to help them and be with them. In verse 26 he calls this advocate the Holy Spirit and says he will teach them and remind them of what Jesus said when he was with them.

Oh great, he’s going to put his Spirit in us. He’s saying though he will be gone, he will be with us in spirit. My problem with that is I know what it means when you have to do something really hard and your friends say, “We’ll be with you in spirit.” It means “I’m glad it’s you not me. I wouldn’t want to have to do that, so good luck. You’re on your own.” But Jesus didn’t mean that. Quite the opposite. He insisted having his Spirit in us would help us. His Spirit will make a difference in us. This promise is actually a reiteration of a promise from Ezekiel 36:26-27 where God said he would put his Spirit in us. That act would give us a new heart and make us different, make us want to do his will.

But how can Jesus put his Spirit in us? What does that mean? Years ago one person said he assumed my dad was a pastor, which was why both of his sons became pastors. He didn’t say it but I suspected he was thinking why else would 2 men from the same family go into pastoral ministry full time? I told him that his assumption was wrong, that my dad was not a pastor. He was a teacher. He taught history and government at East Bakersfield High School. But he was also a man who loved Jesus and lived for Jesus’ kingdom. That was his greatest passion.

Another comment was made by a friend who had known my dad, and he said he could see the spirit of my father alive in me. I hoped that was true, and still do. By that he meant he could see the same passion for the Kingdom of Christ, the same priorities and values that my dad had existing in me and my brother. I’m not exactly like my dad. But that spirit, that same passion is there. How did that come about? It didn’t happen because my dad envisioned his sons going into full time ministry and becoming pastors. We are all familiar with the cliché dad who tries to program and push his son to go into a certain career. My dad was never like that. It would have been contrary to his character and his whole approach to raising his boys. It was a good thing he didn’t push that agenda. Had he done so it likely would have been a near guarantee that we wouldn’t become pastors. Neither of us was especially rebellious, but I know I would not have responded to that kind of pressure, and Jerry would have likely had a stronger reaction to it than I would have.

My dad at one point told me he had hoped I wouldn’t go into full time ministry. He wasn’t opposed to it. I think he kind of hoped that one of his boys would go into a financially rewarding career and there might be a little more money in the family. My brother got his college degree in philosophy, so I was the only remaining hope for a career that might result in some better financial results. The point is, he never pushed any kind of expectation on us.

So how did it happen that both of the sons of a high school history teacher dedicated their lives to ministry and building the kingdom of Christ? How did the spirit of my father get put into us? Some of it was example. We saw how he lived. We saw what mattered to him. He didn’t push it on us, but that life was contagious, and we caught it.

But it wasn’t purely example. There were other things that dad loved and was passionate about, things we saw in him, but they didn’t get put into our hearts. A classic example of that is golf. My dad loved golf. He was the golf coach at our high school for years. He made a bit of an effort to pass that on to us. I remember him taking me out to the golf course a number of times. It did no good. My attitude toward golf was more like the apocryphal quote inaccurately ascribed to Mark Twain, “golf is a good walk spoiled.” Both Jerry and I love sports, both playing them and watching them, but golf just was never a passion or even much of an interest for either of us. I maintain that was especially true of Jerry because golf was the one game I could sometimes beat him at. But he adamantly denies this. Methinks he doth protest too much.

So how did that spirit of my father get planted in us? As far as I know there is no way to completely analyze and explain that. Yes, it had to do with example and with how dad loved us, but there is an element of that one can’t completely understand or explain. If that can happen between a father and a son, is it so hard to believe that Almighty God can do something similar with his children?

This is not an exact analogy, for Jesus insisted the Holy Spirit, his Spirit, is a person, not just a passion. But there is a parallel. Yes, the example of Jesus and his love for us is a big factor. But there is also an ineffable, inexplicable aspect to how Jesus puts his Spirit in us. What we do know is that his Spirit is there. Jesus promised his Spirit would be in us, so we know it is true because he keeps his promise. Romans 8:9 says, “You, however, are not in the realm of the flesh but are in the realm of the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, they do not belong to Christ.” If you have faith in Jesus, if you believe in him, you belong to him, and you have His Spirit in you.

1 Corinthians 2:14 says, “The person without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God but considers them foolishness, and cannot understand them because they are discerned only through the Spirit.” If you accept the things of God, the things that many in the world think absurd, it is because of the Spirit of Jesus in you. Without him, you absolutely would not believe in Jesus.

Jesus displayed total commitment to the will of his Father, no matter what. He had tremendous love for people, so much that he would sacrifice completely for them. He had great courage and resolve, for nothing would divert him from his mission. There was peace, a calmness that was never shaken by opposition, ridicule, rejection or anything else. There was freedom from the opinions of others. There was joy and humor, and there was a world of grace. These things were characteristic of Jesus, and they are also there in his Spirit. These will also be present in those in whom is the Spirit of Christ. We are going to return to a discussion of the Holy Spirit and his role in our lives in chapter 16. For now, know that you have the Spirit of Jesus in you. He is working to create in you the same things we see in Jesus.

CONCLUSION

In this passage Jesus urges us to keep his commands, to obey him. In other places he teaches that this is the path to life. It is how we experience the life we want, the life that is full, that is characterized by peace, joy and meaning. But there are a couple of absolutely crucial truths Jesus teaches us here.

IT ALL STARTS WITH LOVING JESUS

Loving Jesus begins with **appreciating him** and grasping how he loves us. As we get to know Jesus better, we will admire him all the more. As we see how he has loved us, and continues to pour out his love on us day after day, as we see how much grace we have been and are given by him, truly undeserved massive blessings, we can’t help but love him.

IT REQUIRES CHOOSING TO LOVE HIM BY OBEYING HIM

We are commanded to love him with all our heart, soul and mind. A command only makes sense if you have a choice, and we do. Last night we had a birthday party for Anna, our daughter in law. We had a great time at Toby and Anna’s house. The cousins all had a wild and loud time playing together. At one point Laurie sort of took charge of the grandkids, all 6 of them. 7 year old Ella, 6 year old Cara, 4 year old Wesley, 2 year old Bria, and both 1 and a half year olds Jackson and Hunter. That is a semi truck load of busy. That allowed the kids’ parents to sit around the table after dinner and actually have adult conversation. Laurie dearly loves those kids, so it’s not an onerous thing for her. But she purposely chose to be the ringleader for the kids in order to enable our kids to connect with each other. She would have loved to sit around the table with them and talk. But she chose not to do that as an act of love for both our kids and our grandkids. That made the grandkids happy because for them there is nothing better than being with Nana. At one point Laurie was inside with the grandkids and the other adults were all sitting outside talking on tha patio. Laurie went outside for a few moments. Wesley soon came outside and said, “Nana, you need to come back in the house.” No one else. Just Nana. She went inside. Sometimes love is a deliberate choice.

Jesus loves us. We love him back as a result. But there are going to be times when we will need to decide, to choose to love him. To act on our love for him.

LIVE BY THE SPIRIT

The Spirit of Christ is in us, given to us to help us do what Jesus says. But there’s a curious thing about that. There is no definitive concise verse in the Bible that tells us how to do that. There are people who tell us we need to have a dramatic experience and be “baptized by the Spirit.” But 1 Corinthians 12:13 says we were all baptized by one Spirit. Paul wrote that to a group of Christians who he said were all living like babies in Christ. So that’s not the answer. Some people give a list of steps, things to do to be filled with the Spirit. But usually the steps are things we can only do if we are already filled with the Spirit. If we could do them before being filled with the Spirit we wouldn’t need the Spirit, so that makes no sense.

Why isn’t there a passage that says, “here is how you live by the Spirit”? If I asked you to go downstairs and move my car and park it near the elevator, would you expect me to say, “open the front door on the left side and sit in the seat behind the wheel. Push the start button to the right of the wheel. Move the shift lever to your right to R for reverse. Gently step on the left pedal to start backing the car out of the space.” Would you need step by step instructions on how to move the car? No, because you already know how to do it. That’s why there are no step by step instructions on how to live by the Spirit. You already know how to do it.

In Galatians 5:16 Paul wrote, “Walk by the Spirit and you will not carry out the desires of the flesh.” You will obey what Jesus tells us. Then in verse 18 he said, “if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under law.” That seems curious. Why did he mention being under law? Because the Galatians were trying to live by the law rather than by grace, and Paul was making the point that was the same as not living by the Spirit. To live by the Spirit is to live by grace.

So we live by grace, trusting totally in what Jesus has done for us and we exercise faith. We believe the Spirit is in us. We ask him to control us, to make us like Jesus and to give us the ability and strength to do what Jesus commands.