

Creekside Community Church: "Imitating Jesus"  
"Loving God like Jesus Loves God I" Loving God with Our Time  
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The biggest challenge I face each Sunday is how to apply the Bible specifically to our lives. When the crowds came to hear John the Baptist preach, they asked him, "What shall we do?" I think that's what most people ask when they hear a sermon. "OK, but what am I supposed to do with all this? How do I apply this today?" That's particularly true when we talk about commitment to God. I've heard so many sermons end with, "You need to be more committed to God. Put Him first. Surrender everything to Him." And we think, "You're right - but I'm not sure what that means. What does loving God look like in the world where I live?" This fall we're talking about imitating Jesus. That's what a disciple of Christ is, an imitator of Jesus, learning to walk as He walked, to think as He thought and to do what He did. And our focus has been on imitating Jesus' relationship with His Father. How did the Perfect Man walk with God? In September we looked at Jesus and the Scriptures and the place the Bible played in His life. In October and November, we talked about Jesus and prayer and what we learn about prayer from the way He prayed. This month, I want to conclude our series by talking about loving God the way Jesus loved God. When Jesus was asked what the greatest command of the Old Testament was, He replied, " *'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 foremost commandment.*" (Matt. 22:37-38) What does loving God with all our heart, soul and mind mean? It means that we exist for God, that God is the reason for everything we do, that He is the motive behind every act, the purpose for which we live. It means to be devoted to God, to His will and to His use, to live no longer for ourselves but for Him. It means we value pleasing Him above pleasing anyone else, serving Him above serving anything else, and trusting Him above trusting in anyone else. It means that knowing Him, loving Him, spending time with Him, and experiencing His great love for us is more important to us than health, wealth, popularity or recognition. It means He is our Owner, our King and Supreme Authority, our Savior, our Protector, our joy, and our strength. Loving God is our highest duty, our highest privilege and our highest joy. And because Jesus is the perfect human, by looking at how He loved God, we get a clearer idea of how we're to love Him.

An incident which reveals Jesus' great love for His Father is found in John 4:32-34. Early in Jesus' ministry He and His brand new disciples are traveling through Samaria. They stop at a small village and Jesus sits down by a well while His disciples go to buy food. While they're gone, Jesus strikes up a conversation with a Samaritan woman about her relationship with God. His disciples return from shopping and say "Let's eat." *But He said to them, "I have food to eat that you do not know about." So the disciples were saying to one another, "No one brought Him anything to eat, did he?" Jesus said to them, "My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me and to accomplish His work."* This is a great passage on Christ's devotion to His Father and the importance He placed on doing His will. The disciples are concerned that Jesus hasn't eaten for a while but He replies that His true food is to accomplish the will of God who sent Him. This happens right at the beginning of His ministry, but Jesus is already talking like a man with a

mission and completing that mission is the most important thing in His life. But here's the interesting thing to me. Jesus doesn't say that His mission is to do the will of God and to accomplish His work, or His duty is to do the will of God and to accomplish His work. No, Jesus says His food is to do the will of God and to accomplish His work. Do you like to eat? Most people do. Enjoying food is something every age seems to have in common. When our kids were little, most of their conversations centered on food. "What are we having for breakfast dad, waffles?" "What's for lunch? Can we have mac and cheese?" "What's for dinner, Mom?" I thought, these kids live to eat. Their entire life is organized around food. Then we visited my parents. And all they talked about was food. "Oh, we had a great steak dinner last night." Or, "Let's go out for breakfast this morning. Denny's has an all you can eat special." We never outgrow our love for food. We look forward to eating and we get cranky when we don't eat. That's my problem with fasting. I don't miss the food as much as I miss the pleasure of eating. That's why it is significant that Jesus compares living all out for God with food. Notice that Jesus' food is secret food. He says to His disciples, "I have food to eat you that you don't know about." They think he means literal food but He means the strength and the satisfaction that only comes from living for God and for His will. That's food the disciples know nothing about yet. They've only been following Jesus for a few weeks. They have yet to discover the joy that comes from losing their lives in the service of God. And that's true for a lot of folks today. The reason Christians hold back in their relationship with God is because they're afraid they'll miss out if they go all in. "If I commit myself wholly to Him and to doing His will, there will be nothing left for me." One of the great secrets of following Christ is that the more we give Him, the more we receive from Him. The more closely we follow Him, the more delightful our path becomes. Jesus food is secret food and second, it is satisfying food. Just as our body has appetites that can only be satisfied by food, our soul has appetites that can only be satisfied by God. When I'm in the middle of God's will and busy with His work, I'm happy and content. When I'm not doing God's will, regardless of where I am or what I'm doing, there's a feeling of discontent, that there must be something more to life. Augustine wrote, "You have made us for yourself, O God, and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in Thee." There is no lasting satisfaction apart from doing the will of Him who sent us. And Jesus' food is sustaining food. What would happen to you if you didn't eat for a month? At first you feel ravenous but after a few days, you find you're able to ignore the pain in your stomach. You feel ok for a little while but pretty soon you begin to feel faint, weak and kind of dizzy. The fat cells in your face disappear and you look sunken and gaunt. You begin to lose your coordination and simple tasks become difficult. Your body temperature begins to drop and you feel cold all the time. Your blood level falls and iron-deficiency anemia sets in. You find it more and more difficult to think as your brain is deprived of necessary nutrients. You eventually fall into chronic listlessness, unable to even move. Why? You stopped eating. Food is more than pleasure, it is survival. It doesn't simply satisfy a need, it sustains and strengthens us. And if doing the will of God and living for Him is food, then not doing His will is starvation and highly detrimental to our own spiritual health and well-being. The greatest barrier I had to overcome in becoming a Christian was my fear that following Christ would make me miserable; that once God got control of my life, I'd say good bye to happiness, joy and pleasure. In fact, just the opposite proved to be the case. Being involved in God's mission in the world and accomplishing His will is the most satisfying experience of my life. When you think of mission - accomplishing God's

work in the world, think of food. Because that's the way Jesus saw it. Until we see that living for God has to be a non-negotiable if we want to experience life as God designed it to be experienced - satisfying, sustaining, and full of joy, then commitment to God and to His plan will always look like a threat instead of a blessing.

Back to our original question, what does it mean in my every day life to love God with all of our heart, soul, strength and mind? What does commitment to God look like? For the next four weeks, as we look at loving God the way Jesus loved God, we're going to see that our love for God is measured by our time, our talents, our treasures and our thoughts. Today I want to talk about time. Because how we use our time is the clearest indication of what we really love. If I say I love God but never spend time with Him or make time to serve Him, then I'm only fooling myself. Time is the opportunity God gives each of us to love and to serve Him. We cannot love Him or serve Him without time. That's why the use of time will be of utmost importance to the person who commits himself to God and to His will. Let's continue reading John 4:35-36. Remember, the disciples are wondering why Jesus isn't interested in food and He replies "My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me and to accomplish His work. Then He continues, *"Do you not say, 'There are yet four months, and then comes the harvest'?* (Apparently, the harvest is 4 months away) *Behold, I say to you, lift up your eyes and look on the fields, that they are white for harvest. Already he who reaps is receiving wages and is gathering fruit for life eternal; so that he who sows and he who reaps may rejoice together."* Jesus says to His disciples, "Don't think the harvest is sometime in the future. The harvest is now. Just look at the fields." (The Samaritan woman ran back to the village to tell everybody about the prophet she just met who told her things about herself only God could know. So everybody in the village is coming to see Jesus now. The fields are covered with white-robed Samaritans coming out of the village to see Jesus. That's why Jesus says the harvest is now. That's why He spoke to the woman at the well while everybody else went out for lunch. Because Jesus knew His time on earth was limited and that He had to take every opportunity God gave to Him. In fact, as you read through the life of Jesus, you see an urgency, a conviction that His time on earth is limited and that now is the time He must do His Father's will, while He still can. If we're to love God like Jesus loved God, then we must see time the way Jesus saw time. How did Jesus see time? Jesus saw time as not unlimited but short, as not measured by minutes and hours but by opportunities and as not belonging to us but to God.

First, because Jesus loved God, He saw time as not unlimited but as short. That's why He says in John 4, "Don't think the harvest is in the future. The harvest is now." That's why while His disciples were out getting lunch, Jesus was talking to a woman about the welfare of her soul. That's why He says in John 9:4 *"We must work the works of Him who sent Me as long as it is day; night is coming when no one can work."* Jesus knew His time on earth was limited, and that the hour of His death was coming. That's why - while He never seems to be in a hurry - there is always an urgency and a purposefulness in all that He does. He doesn't waste a minute because He knows He doesn't have a minute to waste. He understood the Song of Moses, Psalm 91:12, *"So teach us to number our days that we may present to You a heart of wisdom."* Wisdom is understanding that our days are numbered, that there is a specific number of days which we've been allotted, that our time here is not without limit and that we only have a

certain amount of time to do God's will. Those who recognize the brevity of life are wise. Those who do not the Bible calls fools. Look at what Jesus says in Luke 12:16-21 *"And He told them a parable, saying, 'The land of a rich man was very productive. And he began reasoning to himself, saying, 'What shall I do, since I have no place to store my crops?' Then he said, 'This is what I will do: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I will say to my soul, 'Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years to come; take your ease, eat, drink and be merry.'"* But God said to him, *'You fool! This very night your soul is required of you; and now who will own what you have prepared?' "So is the man who stores up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God."* Why did God call this man a fool? Because he had prepared for his financial future but had neglected his spiritual future. He thought he still had many years left to prepare to meet God. He didn't recognize how brief the time we have to prepare for eternity. Or look at what Jesus says in Matthew 24:45-51, *"Who then is the faithful and sensible slave whom his master put in charge of his household to give them their food at the proper time? Blessed is that slave whom his master finds so doing when he comes. Truly I say to you that he will put him in charge of all his possessions. But if that evil slave says in his heart, 'My master is not coming for a long time,' and begins to beat his fellow slaves and eat and drink with drunkards; the master of that slave will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour which he does not know, and will cut him in pieces and assign him a place with the hypocrites; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."* What's the difference between the faithful slave and the evil slave? The faithful slave knows that time is short, that his master can return at any moment and so he prepares. The evil slave doesn't think his master is coming for a long time and so he lives a self-indulgent life. What do these two parables have in common? In both, Jesus warns of those who don't recognize the shortness of time and the need to do the will of God while we can. The old Puritans encourage us to think often about the day of our death and about what will be most important to us then. I doubt that on the day I die, I will be concerned about Cal football or my time in the 100 fly or how my investments are doing. I won't be interested in the sports page or the latest political news. What will matter to me on that day will be the people I'm leaving behind and the Christ I am about to see face to face and what will be important to Him when I see Him. If I see time the way Jesus saw time, those are the things that should be most important to me every day of my life, because today is the last day I'm guaranteed. If like Jesus, I see my time on this earth as short, I will do the will of Him who sent me just as Christ devoted His time to doing the will of Him who sent Him. I won't look forward to a long life or prosperity or recognition or any other temporal reward but I will live for the day when I stand before Christ and hear the words, "Well done, good and faithful servant. You were faithful with a few things. Be in charge of many things. Enter into the joy of Your master." Richard Baxter, the great Puritan pastor wrote that it is a great mercy of God that this life is so short, so uncertain and so frequented by dangers, sickness and troubles because it reminds us to be ready for eternity. But youth and health and happiness in this world deceive us into thinking that our life will be long and so we put away the thought of the day of our departure as if it is far off. Our failure to recognize the brevity of life is one reason we are tempted by luxury, ambition, worldliness and sin. If you knew you only had one year left, would it change the way you are living now? If I love God like Jesus loved God, then I will recognize that my time to do His will is short and I will be diligent in doing it.

Second, because Jesus loved God, He saw time as not measured in minutes and hours but in opportunities. Even though all time is measured the same, all time is not equal. Different times bring different opportunities. Some of you are morning people. You have a lot more energy to get things done in the morning than you do in the evening. Others don't really wake up and get going until everybody else goes to bed. There are opportunities we have when we're young that we won't have when we're old - and vice versa. When you have young children, you have less time for other things than when you were single or when you're empty nesters. You can accomplish more when you're healthy than when you're sick. The point is, all time is not equal. Time is really a string of opportunities and the Christlike person takes advantage of those opportunities when they arrive, just as Jesus did in John 4. Even though it was lunch time and Jesus was tired and hungry, He took the opportunity to talk to the woman at the well because He knew this opportunity might never come again. In the 24<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> chapters of Matthew, Jesus gives four parables about how to be ready when He returns to earth or when we return to Him, whichever comes first. There's the parable of the foolish servant who didn't think His master was going to return which we just looked at, the parable of the 10 virgins waiting for the bride groom. 5 of whom were ready and were admitted into the wedding feast and 5 of whom were not and were excluded from the wedding feast. Then Jesus tells the story of the master who entrusts money to each of his servants to carry on business for him while he is away on a trip. Two are diligent and make a profit for their master while one is lazy and makes nothing for his master. Finally there is the judgment of the sheep and the goats. The sheep feed the hungry, give water to the thirsty, befriend the stranger, clothe the naked, and visit the sick and the prisoners. The goats do not. In each parable, there are people who are rewarded and people who are condemned. But no one is condemned for what he did. People are condemned for what they failed to do, for not taking advantage of the opportunities they were given. If we see time the way Jesus saw time, we'll see it in terms of opportunities to take advantage of, not in terms of hours to fill. This has been one of my greatest mistakes in how I view time. I've thought of time as something to fill, to get as much done as I can, to stay busy. I love routine and predictability and knowing what I need to do and when. So I live a pretty regimented life. But the trap I've fallen into over and over is thinking that if I'm busy, I'm productive and ignoring opportunities because they don't fit into my plan for the day. Last Saturday morning, Laurie and I went for a walk and when we got home, our friend Rogelio was working in our yard. We stopped to talk for a minute but in my mind, I'm already moving on to the next item in my morning schedule. But Laurie asks Rogelio how his Thanksgiving was and he says, "OK" in a way you know it wasn't ok, and Laurie keeps probing and pretty soon Rogelio opens up about his dad who's dying in Mexico and waiting for that phone call that he hopes doesn't come and wondering how he'll get back down there to see him. We've known Rogelio for over a year but this was the first time that he really opened up about his life and family and we told him we and Creekside would be praying for him. It was a sweet time and I felt we really made a deeper connection with him. But the only reason that conversation happened was because Laurie saw an opportunity and took it. By myself, I would have missed it completely. That's the way opportunities to serve God and others happen - while we're planning to do something else. They're almost always inconvenient. They can't be scheduled. But if my goal is to do the will of God and to accomplish His work, then I must be on the lookout for those opportunities. Because all time is not equal, there are times when we have opportunities which

we will not have at other times and we need to take advantage of them and use our time for the greatest good, regardless of our plan or schedule. The person who takes advantage of the opportunities he has to serve God or people whenever they appear, sacrificing less important things if necessary, is the person who truly loves God. Otherwise, I'm not serving God, I'm serving my schedule and the way I want my life to be instead of the way He wants my life to be.

Here's a third way Jesus saw time because He loved God: our time doesn't belong to us but to God. Jesus was a man on a mission, sent from God to accomplish His work and so He saw His time on earth primarily as the opportunity God had given Him to do His will. The night that Jesus was betrayed, He prays in John 17:4-5, *"I glorified You on the earth, having accomplished the work which You have given Me to do. Now, Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was."* Jesus says, "I've completed My mission, Father. It's time to come home." Jesus was only on earth for 33 years because that's how long it took Him to do His Father's will. And if we see time the way Jesus saw time, we recognize it as something we receive from God for the accomplishment of His purpose. Psalm 139:16 says, *"In Your book were all written the days that were ordained for me, when as yet there was not one of them."* Paul says in Acts 17:26 that *"God made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined their appointed times and the boundaries of their habitation,"* God determined the time we would spend in this world before we were born. The time we have here is given by Him and belongs to Him and not to us. He entrusts it to us to manage in the pursuit of His interests and will. And so if I see time the way Jesus saw time, I see it as a resource God has entrusted to me for the pursuit of His will. It's not my time, it's His. That's why the Bible says that laziness and procrastination are sins. If as Jesus says in Matthew 12, we will be held accountable for every idle word we say, then I think it's safe to assume we'll also be held accountable for every idle hour we waste. Because we're wasting somebody else's time. The way we use our time is one of the clearest indicators of what we really love, what our commitments really are. If I love God, I will spend regular time seeking Him, learning about Him, and serving Him. And whatever I do, whether it's working or serving or resting or recreating, I'll be doing it for Him and for His purpose. Remember, God doesn't want to work us to death. He commanded us to rest on the Sabbath. He created us for play as well as for work, for rest as well as exertion. When I see all of my time as belonging to Him, it integrates and balances all those things around one mission. I love to swim. But I don't swim as an end in itself. I swim because it keeps me healthy so I can serve God longer and more effectively. I swim because it allows me to make friends with people who need Christ. I swim because it develops my self discipline and self knowledge. I swim because not only because I like to but because it advances God's purpose for my life.

One practical application from the way Jesus saw time is our need to live by clear priorities. The more I see time as a limited resource, the more I'll want to use it wisely. And if I see time as opportunities, I realize that much of my time is spent on non-productive tasks which are preventing me from doing what's really important. and that busyness is more a result of a lack of clear priorities than it is a lack of time. Finally, when I see that my time belongs to God and not to me, I realize that He has given me all the time I need to do His will and if I feel like I don't have enough time, it's because I'm doing things that aren't His will. That's when I begin to

eliminate and simply and ask myself, what's the best way to use the time I have today, I'm not only more productive, I'm more relaxed. I get off the hamster wheel of endless activities - by seeking God and finding out what He wants me to do. If the way I use my time is a picture of my love for God, here are some questions to ask yourself;

1. How much is God's purpose for my life seen in my daily schedule? If somebody followed me around for a week, would they say that my top priorities are knowing Christ and making Him known to others?
2. How often do I remember the work still to be accomplished or about the small amount of time I have left to do God's will?
3. How often do I consider what will be most important to me on the day I meet Christ?
4. How ready am I today to enter eternity?

We looked at Acts 17: 26 earlier. I want to finish up by looking at it again and at the following verse. Paul says, *God made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined their appointed times and the boundaries of their habitation, that they should seek God if perhaps they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each of us...*" The primary reason we've been given the time we've been given is to enable us to find God. That's our purpose now, to seek Him and to find Him before we enter eternity. Have you found Him? Because He's not far away from you. In fact, He's seeking you. That's why He sent Jesus.

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