

The Good Heart – Accepts the Word Mark 4.1-20

Open with me to Mark 4.20 where Jesus explains that the Good Heart – Accepts the Word.

With the death and burial of our 40th President there has been a national resurrection of discussions about the greatness of Ronald Regan's life. Perhaps the single greatest event he is remembered for is breaking down the walls of Communism and opening freedom to so many. The Iron Curtain enslaved millions largely because of the incredible dedication of the few. Those devoted followers of this atheistic philosophy were able to captivate much of the world in one generation.

Communism rapidly conquered much of the world because of the total dedication of a few. In 1903, one man with a handful of followers began communism. His name was Vladimir Lenin (1870–1924). In 1917 he overthrew the Russian government with only 40,000 Communist Party members. His movement became the fastest growing system in the history of the world. By the 1950's his followers controlled about 62 percent of the world—and brutally held on to their power.

Communism triumphed largely because of the complete devotion of its followers. Their dedication was typified in an actual letter written by a young communist to his fiancée, breaking off their engagement. The girl's pastor sent the letter to Billy Graham, who referred to it in a crusade message a number of years ago. The communist wrote:

There is one thing, which I am in dead earnest about, and that is the communist cause. It is my life, my business, my religion, my hobby, my sweetheart, my wife, my mistress, and my bread and meat. I work at it in the daytime and dream of it at night. Its hold on me grows, not lessens, as time goes on; therefore, I cannot carry on a friendship, a love affair, or even a

conversation without relating it to this force which both drives and guides my life. I evaluate people, looks, ideas, and actions according to how they affect the communist cause, and by their attitude toward it. I've already been in jail because of my ideals, and if necessary, I'm ready to go before a firing squad.¹

That is total dedication. Without divine help, God's Grace, the Spirit's power, or Christ's love – look at the intense devotion humans can produce. Can you imagine what God does when He finds this level of dedication in our hearts, minds, and wills as His children? To answer that question, turn with me to the life of another man. In 1917 as Lenin was master to his deeply devoted revolutionaries, God was at work in the heart of one of His servants – drawing him to deeply devote himself to Jesus. This man was being mastered by the Master of Heaven and Earth – at the very same time Lenin was starting his destructive revolution.

Please open to **Hymn # 372**.

The words of this hymn were written when the author was 51, unable to finish the career he studied to do, weak and sickly, unemployed, and trying to make ends meet selling things door to door.

This hymn was his testimony of how he made it through life when it seemed everything was going against him, and the world around him was crumbling. Look at the bottom of page 372, what year did he write these words? 1917.

What was happening in the year 1917? Lenin was conquering Russia and World War I was grinding on across Europe. Hundreds of miles of trenches oozed with millions of fighting men in a river of death, gas warfare, and plagues.² Now look at those words written in some of the darkest hours of human history. And from those times come one of the greatest hymns of our time!

“Living for Jesus”

- Living for Jesus a life that is true, striving to please Him in all that I do, yielding allegiance, glad-hearted and free—this is the pathway of blessing for me.

¹ William MacDonald, *True Discipleship* (Kansas City, KS: Walther Publishers, 1975), p. 33.

² In 1917 alone 2,676 ships would be sunk in the warfare and hundreds of thousands would die. America had sat out much of the war, but then came April 6th and America entered the War as we declared war on Germany and later on Austria-Hungary. By July waves of boys that would end up totaling 4.3 million American soldiers began to start their journey toward the front where 57,476 would die. World War I saw 65 million soldiers fight, 8 ½ million killed, and 21 million returned home without the health and body they had before the war because of being wounded. And in the lands to which they stumbled back they found them ravaged by war and 10 million of their own relatives dead as civilian casualties.

- o Living for Jesus who died in my place, bearing on Calv'ry my sin and disgrace—such love constrains me to answer His call, follow His leading and give Him my all.
- o Living for Jesus thru earth's little while, my dearest treasure the light of His smile, seeking the lost ones He died to redeem, bringing the weary to find rest in Him.
- o **Chorus:** O Jesus, Lord and Savior, I give myself to Thee, for Thou in Thine atonement didst give Thyself for me. I own no other Master—my heart shall be Thy throne: My life I give, henceforth to live, O Christ, for Thee alone.

Where did such a confession come from? A 1st Century saint? No, just from a man who was too weak and sick to do he wanted to do in life. He had to leave full time vocational ministry and do a door-to-door sale job just to stay alive and eat. His name was Thomas Obadiah Chisholm. Born in a humble log cabin in Franklin, Kentucky, on July 29, 1866; without the benefit of high school or advanced training, he began his career as a schoolteacher at the age of sixteen in the same country schoolhouse where he had received his elementary training.

Because of a weak body, poor health, and limited finances – Tom spent most of his long life indoors seated at a writing table. Writing, however, was always Mr. Chisholm's first love, and he wrote more than 1,200 poems, of which 800 were published.

At 51 Tom wrote out his personal testimony of consecration in song. This poem, prayer, and consecration hymn has been the pathway of thousands who have sought to deepen their devotion to Jesus. "Living for Jesus" was published that same year in a hymnal, in 1917. Mr. Chisholm concluded a long and fruitful ministry on February 29, 1960, at the Methodist Home for the Aged in Ocean Grove, New Jersey.

How do we cultivate that level of dedication to Jesus? In Mark 4.20 Jesus calls this "accepting" the Word – welcoming into our hearts and lives His Word and His way as our own.

Stand and Read

What does a heart look like that accepts the Word? How is a life lived that welcomes as its own Jesus Christ the Word of God? The Gospels capture six elements from the very lips of Jesus. Listen to Him. Accept His Word. Desire this depth of devotion, and welcome Him by giving yourself to Him.

Pray

JESUS WANTS TO HAVE ALL OF US

In the Gospels we can trace Christ's call to commitment. He states we can't be His disciples unless we desire to evidence these characteristics.³ Here are six ways that we evidence Christ as our Teacher, and that we are His Followers.

1st - Hearts opened completely in love for Christ – that means we love Him MOST.

"If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple" (Luke 14:26).

In this verse, the word "hate" essentially has to do with a comparison of loves. Simply put, our love for God is to be so great that, in comparison, love for even the dearest of relations should seem as hatred. This is based upon His first and greatest commandment:

"You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind" (Matt. 22:37-38).

In both the good times and the bad, we will continually be confronted with whether we are going to obey Christ and His Word—or buckle under to pressures to compromise our faith and "go with the crowd." Each opportunity to serve God represents this test: Who do we love *most*? If we do not give Christ the preeminence He deserves, He says that we are not worthy of Him (Col. 1:18; Matt. 10:37).

Loving God with an unrivaled love means that we will esteem nothing—family, friends, possessions, job, fame, power, pleasures, and especially ourselves—of more worth to us than He is. In so doing, we demonstrate His "worthship" to us by choosing to do things *His* way, and not our own. This is the essence of true worship. By losing our lives in that manner for Christ's sake, we will find them (Matt. 16:25).

Stanza 2B: "such love constrains me to answer His call, follow His leading and give Him my all."

³ For an excellent exposition on these points, see: J. Oswald Sanders' *SPIRITUAL DISCIPLESHIP* [with Study Guide], (Moody Press, 1994), p. 19.

2nd -- Bodies offered completely – that means we die to SELF.

“Whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple” (Luke 14:27).

This verse is related to Luke 14:26 in that to “bear [our] cross” means hating our own life enough for Christ’s sake that we voluntarily crucify self daily. In Mark 8:34 Christ states, *“Whoever desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me.”* That word “deny” has the strongest meaning possible—to utterly deny, totally separate from self. Taking up our cross by denying self is imperative because it’s impossible to serve two masters (Matt. 6:24). The following testimony by George Mueller beautifully describes the heart of such a life.

“There was a day when I died, utterly died to George Mueller; . . . to his opinions, preferences, tastes, and will; died to the world, its approval or censure; died to the approval or blame of even my brethren and friends. Since then I have studied to show myself approved only unto God.”⁴

Dying to self is a prerequisite to living for Christ. Paul wrote of this when he said,

“I am crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God” (Gal. 2:20).

In spite of the cost of death to self, and whatever personal suffering that may bring, a dedicated disciple will follow after Christ, wherever He chooses to lead.

To not bear the cross of self-denial pits our will against God’s, which is prideful. Pride is the root of all sin because self competes with God for control and glory. In contrast, humility is the root of all virtue because humility denies self and says, “Not my will, but Yours be done!” Such humility produces deep and abiding joy as the result of knowing—and truly pleasing—Almighty God, our Savior and Lord (John 15:10-11). Living a life that is uncompromising when it comes to bearing the cross of self-denial is a mark of a true disciple.

⁴ Mrs. Charles E. Cowman, *Springs in the Valley* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1939), p. 13.

Stanza 1B: "yielding allegiance, glad-hearted and free—this is the pathway of blessing for me."

3rd -- Wills surrender unreservedly to Christ – that means we will OBEY.

"Whoever of you does not forsake all that he has cannot be My disciple" (Luke 14:33).

Because Christ purchased us with His blood, we belong wholly to Him (1 Cor. 6:19-20). In light of this, He expects us to acknowledge His rightful ownership by not holding back anything for ourselves.

As our Master, Christ has the right of disposal of all our possessions (Matt. 19:21). Christ is the Owner; as His stewards, we are only employees. Consider the testimonies of such godly disciples as Martin Luther, John Wesley, and David Livingstone.

- Martin Luther once said, "I have held many things in my hands and I have lost them all. But whatever I have placed in God's hands, that I still possess."
- "I value all things," said Wesley, "only by the price they shall gain in eternity."
- Similarly, Livingstone stated, "I place no value on anything I possess except in relation to the Kingdom of God." These men truly forsook everything for the cause of Christ!

Christ says to us likewise, "Out of love for Me, forsake all you own—and your life will be truly blessed!" We should be so captivated with the Lord that we invest all we have for Him, letting nothing take higher priority than obedience and worship of Christ. A life given unreservedly back to God as a love offering is what stewardship is all about. Stewardship is not only about money, it is about life itself. Time and life are far greater treasures than money and possessions. First and foremost, God wants *us*—unreservedly!

The essentials of discipleship aren't easy. We must desire to evidence an unrivaled love for Christ, an uncompromising life of self-sacrifice, and an unreserved surrender of all to Christ. The Lord Jesus Christ says that the following characteristics will be manifested in true disciples, and that others will notice that allegiance to Him because of it.

Chorus: "I own no other Master—my heart shall be Thy throne: My life I give, henceforth to live, O Christ, for Thee alone."

4th -- Eyes focused eagerly on God's Word – that means we hunger to see Him in His Word.

"Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, 'If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free'" (John 8: 31-32).

Note that Jesus is addressing those who "believed Him"; belief in Christ as personal Savior and Lord is the first step of discipleship (John 3:16-18). Abiding in His Word bears witness that we have true life in Christ. In Greek, "abide" (*meno*) in verse 31 primarily means "to stay." By staying in His Word, becoming not only a "hearer" but also a "doer," we show that His love is in us (James 1:22-25; John 15:10-11). As we know Truth experientially, we too, like the psalmist, ought to cry out to our awesome Lord:

"Oh, how I love Your law! It is my meditation all the day. . . . I have restrained my feet from every evil way, That I may keep Your word. I have not departed from Your judgments, For You Yourself have taught me. How sweet are Your words to my taste, Sweeter than honey to my mouth! Through Your precepts I get understanding; Therefore I hate every false way" (Ps. 119:97; 101-104).

Oh, that each of us would have this same passion for God and His Word! In light of the rich treasures to be had, it's inconceivable that the majority of Christians today have not read the Bible through even *once*—especially since it takes an average reader only 15 minutes daily. If you haven't already been doing so, I challenge you to begin reading the Bible through no less than once a year. Beyond reading the Word faithfully, we should also do word studies to pursue a theme of interest; read commentaries; do Bible study guides; memorize Scripture, and meditate upon it daily.

If all we do is hear the Word preached, we're like a person trying to grasp a softball with just our little finger. Adding hearing plus faithful reading is better, and adding study is better still. But we cannot get much of a hold on the ball with only three fingers. We need all four fingers and an opposing thumb to firmly grasp a softball, and we need to hear, read, study, memorize, and meditate upon God's Word in order to firmly grasp the Scriptures. Thus when the storms of life assail, our foundation is secure because it's grounded in the Rock (Matt. 7:24-25).

We will never become genuine disciples without having an unbounded passion to read, study, and obey His precious Word. This is what will inspire

us to truly love Christ and others as He has commanded, all relationships are centered in fulfilling these two loves (Matt. 22:37-40).

Stanza 3A: "Living for Jesus thru earth's little while, my dearest treasure the light of His smile."

5th -- Actions focused on selflessly on love for others – that means we love with Christ's LOVE.

"A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:34-35).

The commandment to love was not new, but the manner of love to be shown was now taking on a new dimension—to love as *Christ* has loved. What type love had His disciples experienced from Christ up to that point? Matthew Henry writes:

He spoke kindly to them, concerned himself heartily for them, and for their welfare, instructed, counseled, and comforted them, prayed with them and for them, vindicated them when they were accused, took their part when they were run down, and publicly owned them to be dearer to him than his *mother, or sister, or brother*. He reproved them for what was amiss, and yet compassionately bore with their failings, excused them, made the best of them, and passed by many an oversight. Thus he *had* loved them, and just now washed their feet [vv. 12-17]; and thus they *must* love one another, and love *to the end*.⁵

And love to the end Christ did—all the way to Calvary—a final example of what it means to love "as He has loved us." He loved us unconditionally, and that is the way He wants us to love one another:

"Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends" (John 15:13).

Our homes are the basic testing grounds for learning how to love Christ's way. It is much easier to fool others who don't know about all our weaknesses, but it is the day-to-day relationships within our families that reveal our true character.

⁵ Matthew Henry, *MATTHEW HENRY'S COMMENTARY, Vol. V.- Matthew to John* (McLean, VA: MacDonald Publishing Company), p.1104.

Personal relationships should not be guided by whether we *feel* like loving at any particular moment. Loving as Christ loves involves commitment: With a voluntary act of our wills, we *choose*, by God's grace, to always act in the best interest of others, regardless of their responses to us .

(Rom. 13:10).

Our wives and children need to see Calvary love compelling us to live sacrificially for Christ's sake and theirs. This is how the world will distinguish us from Satan's crowd, they will know we are clearly Christ's disciples.

(2 Cor. 5:14-15)

Stanza 3B: "seeking the lost ones He died to redeem, bringing the weary to find rest in Him.

6th -- Lives spent intentionally on fruit bearing for God's glory – that means Walk in the SPIRIT.

"If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you. By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples"
(John 15:7-8).

The ultimate goal of discipleship is this: ". . . be imitators of God as dear children. And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma" (Eph. 5:1-2). This is an ongoing, lifelong process by which the Holy Spirit uses the Word of God, to conform the child of God, into the image of God, for the glory of God. In so doing, He produces in us the fruit of love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Gal. 5:22). That fruit is manifested in a true disciple's life as an:

Stanza 2B: such love constrains me to answer His call, follow His leading and give Him my all.