

# “GOD’S LOVE IN ACTION”

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**Text: 1 John 3:16-24 NLT**

**God’s Word: Matthew 25:31-46 NLT**

In Matthew Chapter 7 Jesus says an interesting thing. He says: *“Not everyone who calls out to me, ‘Lord! Lord!’ will enter the Kingdom of Heaven. Only those who actually do the will of my Father in heaven will enter. On judgment day many will say to me, ‘Lord! Lord! We prophesied in your name and cast out demons in your name and performed many miracles in your name.’ But I will reply, ‘I never knew you. Get away from me, you who break God’s laws.’”*

That’s some pretty heavy stuff. It makes me want to find out what the Father’s will is, doesn’t it you? Hopefully, our Scripture Lesson for this morning from 1st John can provide a bit of a road map for us.

## **1 John 3:16-24**

*<sup>16</sup> We know what real love is because Jesus gave up his life for us. So we also ought to give up our lives for our brothers and sisters. <sup>17</sup> If someone has enough money to live well and sees a brother or sister in need but shows no compassion—how can God’s love be in that person?*

*<sup>18</sup> Dear children, let’s not merely say that we love each other; let us show the truth by our actions. <sup>19</sup> Our actions will show that we belong to the truth, so we will be confident when we stand before God. <sup>20</sup> Even if we feel guilty, God is greater than our feelings, and he knows everything.*

*<sup>21</sup> Dear friends, if we don’t feel guilty, we can come to God with bold confidence. <sup>22</sup> And we will receive from him whatever we ask because we obey him and do the things that please him.*

*<sup>23</sup> And this is his commandment: We must believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and love one another, just as he commanded us. <sup>24</sup> Those who obey God’s commandments remain in fellowship with him, and he with them. And we know he lives in us because the Spirit he gave us lives in us.*

I think sometimes we are good at believing in Jesus’ name, but perhaps, not so good at loving one another as Jesus commanded. I think some of us have a picture in our mind of God that is all backward and mixed up. We think God is some moralistic judge just waiting for us to “step out of line.” That God is not “fun.”

That we, somehow, have to walk around with a serious and miserable scowl on our faces. But Jesus was happy. People wanted to hang out with Jesus—especially the marginalized folks: prostitutes, people with physical and mental illnesses, tax collectors, women—the folks that the religious establishment left out and pushed out. And why did they love to hang out with Jesus? Because He wasn't like the priests and the other institutional religious leaders. He didn't judge them.

You know, when you think about it, if Jesus had chosen to, He could have made a really good Pharisee. I'm sure it was a temptation the devil put before Him again and again. It would have been totally acceptable, in the eyes of the religious institution for Jesus to join them in putting the heavy burdens of the Law, burdens which are impossible to carry—on the shoulders of the people—and not lift a finger to help them.

He would have been the Big Guy in town if He did what He did in order to be noticed by others. It would have been fine, in the eyes of society, if Jesus wore extra-wide prayer bands on His arms and long tassels on His clothes in order to make Himself look special and extra holy. It would have been thought to be normal if He had loved to sit in the places of honor at high-faluting banquets for the super superior. If He played His cards right, He could have enjoyed the prestige of being greeted with honor in the markets and called "Rabbi" wherever He went. The legal experts and the Pharisees would have loved Him. He would have lived a long life. He never would have died on that shameful, curse-ed, bloody Cross!!!

Jesus would have been considered a fine upstanding religious man if He had just mouthed the right words and kept away from the ragamuffins of society. But that is not Who Jesus was. That is not Who God is. And that is not the will of the Father.

Instead, Jesus humbled Himself, and although He was God—He made Himself a servant. And the so-called "losers" of the world loved Him because He loved them. As a matter of fact, He loved them right into the Kingdom of God. Jesus "laid down his life for us." And John tells us that "This is how we know what love is...And that we ought to lay down our lives for others."

Does this mean, in order to do the will of the Father, we are called to be crucified just like Jesus? No. Jesus already did that. He took our sins upon Himself. He became our Sacrificial Lamb. The victory has been won. He died so we don't have to. So what does it mean for us to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters? It means, not just saying the right words...or mumbling the right creeds.

Laying down our lives means responding to people in need—like Jesus did. It means making time for others. It means befriending the homeless, the ailing, the hurting, the drug addict, and the mentally ill. It means allowing the Holy Spirit to work in us in such ways that when our fellow human beings are hurting—it affects us deeply. It means we don't

shut the rest of the world out, and just go about our business spending our lives just on ourselves. It means we don't ignore the marginalized, the unpopular, the annoying.

And this kind of stuff, although it is not always easy, is the most worthwhile way to live our lives. It makes our lives full. It brings us closer to God. And it really is the only way to be Christian. For the Christian life IS a life laid down for others. There is no other way. And it's easy to forget that.

Lots of people say they believe in the name of Jesus Christ. But if that doesn't change the way we live our lives and spend our time, it doesn't mean much. John tells us that believing in the name of Jesus Christ means believing Jesus Christ saves us by making us like Himself. And what did Jesus do? Jesus fed the hungry. Jesus loved on the poor. And He went where they were. Jesus took care of people's immediate and eternal needs. Jesus had compassion on folks and His compassion led Him to action. And His action led to His rejection by the elite and His death on the Cross.

James, the flesh and blood brother of Jesus, had this to say: <sup>4</sup> *What good is it, dear brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but don't show it by your actions? Can that kind of faith save anyone?* <sup>15</sup> *Suppose you see a brother or sister who has no food or clothing,* <sup>16</sup> *and you say, "Good-bye and have a good day; stay warm and eat well"—but then you don't give that person any food or clothing. What good does that do?* <sup>17</sup> *So you see, faith by itself isn't enough. Unless it produces good deeds, it is dead and useless...For even the demons believe.*

Again, Jesus says: *"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven..."*

What this passage from **1st John** is saying is that "If we close our hearts to a sister or brother in need, we close our hearts to God Himself." Have you ever done that?

I have many times. It's not a fun way to live. As a matter of fact, it's not living at all.

What did Jesus say in Matthew Chapter 25? *"I tell you the truth, whatever you did not do for the least of these, you did not do for me."*

John is pretty hard on people who call themselves Christians, who say they have the love of God in their hearts, but don't share their material goods with those in need. We can only imagine what He would say to us today in a world where almost half the people live on less than two dollars a day!!! And here in America, we have people working three jobs and they barely get by—while others have so much money they don't know what to do with it. They live in gated communities, spending all their money and free time on themselves.

Many Christians today claim they believe in the truth of the Gospel. But what is the truth of the Gospel, if it doesn't mean living a life of sacrificial love for others?

There is a parable in Mathew 21 called the Parable of Two Sons. In that parable a man asks each of his sons to go into the vineyard to work. The first son answers that he will not go; later he repents and goes in the vineyard to work. The second son answers that he will go to work, but he never goes. The second son responds with words only. The first son loves his Father with action.

When the crowds followed Jesus with no supplies, the Twelve disciples were told to feed 5,000 people plus women and children with five loaves of bread and two fish. Everyone ate their fill, and there was enough food left over for the disciples to fill twelve baskets. Miracles happen when we put our faith into action—when we do the Father’s will—nothing is impossible.

John writes: *“Beloved, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have boldness before God; and receive from him whatever we ask, because we obey his commandments and do what pleases him.”*

Giving to those in need, out of compassion and love, is what pleases God. In our Scripture Lesson for this morning it says: *“Little children, let us love, not with words or speech, but in truth and action...This is [God’s] commandment, that we should believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, just as He has commanded us. All who obey his commandments abide in [God], and [God] abides in them. And by this we know that [God] abides in us, by the Spirit he has given us.”*

Are you remaining in God; is God remaining in you? What is the evidence that God’s Spirit is operating through your life? Do you just say the right words, but not much else? Do you help with the Food Pantry? Do you have dreams about ways we can be the hands and feet of Christ in our Community? Maybe hosting a FREE Laundry Day at Stouts? Maybe making sandwiches and delivering them to those families and individuals being housed at Holiday Inn Express or at Weaver’s? Maybe it’s not about asking folks to come to us...maybe it’s about us going to them?

Do you help with Sunday school, the Youth group? What about VBS? Are you growing in your faith so that you can help someone else grow in theirs? Are you daily laying down your life in order to serve God and your neighbor? When you see a person in need, do you care? Do you act? Do you share, even when it’s not convenient for you to do so? Are you being transformed into the likeness of Christ? Does your faith in Jesus move you to action?

This is important stuff—life and death stuff. *“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven. Only those who do the will of my Father who is in heaven will enter.”*

Will you enter?