

The Truth in Jesus
Second Series – Sermon Twenty-Four
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We are now at the closing reflection of Series Two that began with “The Way.” Its opening question for the “rich young ruler” was, “Leave all and follow me?” Now at the close in “The Truth in Jesus,” the question remains the same but is personally addressed to us. In “The Way,” the young man had been offered a relationship with Jesus to live intimately with the Eternal Son, and he answered no and walked away sad. We are being offered this same relationship as Jesus’ disciples today, and the same question is being asked of us, will you FOLLOW Me? The issue is a simple one, followers follow, not lead!

Jesus is the sum and summit of all creation. He is its Creator and Sustainer, the Master of the Universe! Will we follow the Master? Will we do as He says and live as He lives? For MacDonald, doing and living is simply obedience. Being a disciple of Christ is not about law or philosophy but about a way of Living. Obedience is not about keeping rules or imitating His behavior but becoming like Him in our flesh as He was like us in ours! Jesus alone knows what this is and how to live it moment by moment!

Outline

Knowing Jesus Christ - The Gospel is not information, proof texts strung together like pearls on a string that forms a system of thought.

Protests - Faith in Him is the “leaving of our ways, our things, ourselves, and taking His and Him!”

Primacy of Obedience - Followers, follow, not lead. Are we following?

Leaving All - A “crucified” person has left ALL!

Obedience Leads to Truth - Jesus did not come to give us heaven here or there after our own imaginations, but to provide us with His Life and a Home in our Father's heart which is our destiny!

Ephesians 4:20-22 NLT

"But that isn't what you learned about Christ. Since you have heard about Jesus and have learned the truth that comes from him, throw off your old sinful nature and your former way of life, which is corrupted by lust and deception."

Knowing Jesus Christ

Who do we think Jesus is? It should be a startling question that we may have come to know a false Christ! To know Him wrongly must be far worse than not knowing Him at all. And even worse that His place may be occupied by an imposter that is hard to cast out! The point is, do we know Him as He revealed Himself or as others have taught Him who thought they knew Him but did not? Do we think we see Him with freshly minted ideas, those full of human imaginations and reasonings, or do we truly know Him after the Spirit, in our human way as His Father knows Him in His?

Christianity has been more open to corruption throughout history than the Jewish law was because it is higher and broader in its scope and therefore more open to error. So, do we know Jesus in false doctrines and teachings about Him, or do we know Him intimately? Learning things about Him through the true or false lens of theology is only about filling our heads full of information. Do we know Him as He lives in us, in our hearts in an ever-growing relationship as the power of Life?

I came across a statement by a notable atheist who claims we can know nothing about the "Infinite and Eternal Source" from which all things proceed!

Thus, "The inflicting of penalties on Adam's descendants through hundreds of generations for a small transgression they possibly did not commit. And the subsequent damnation of all humanity that does not take advantage of a supposed way of receiving forgiveness for it. The message of which most of humanity has never heard. This supposed forgiveness is achieved by the human sacrifice of a perfectly innocent son to satisfy an assumed need for a pacifying victim. If these same actions were assigned to a human ruler, they would receive extreme responses of disgust and horror. And to assign them to the Creating Source of all things, even if they are not thought to be full of conflicts, must be unbelievable?"

I do not reference this passage to oppose its statements, for I agree with them entirely. I feel it would be irresponsible not to say so. Nor do I intend to challenge its writer or those who agree with him. The passage expresses well what I have often said myself, for their objections are my objections as well. Some of my earliest memories and struggles were with this same false system they attack. This system's clear link to paganism I reject wholeheartedly in the name of Christ and true righteousness.

But if I were to address these atheists, I would ask how, through the process of refusing what is plainly false, did they not see the civilizing effects of these men's teaching on the world more than any others? How recognizing this effect and knowing that their teaching could not have done it, why this insight would not cause them to inquire as to how good could come from these obvious and horrible lies they have expressed? How could these lies not be able to destroy the life-giving power of the Gospel?

I suppose they would agree there was a real man named Jesus who died for the truth He taught. Would they agree that He died for what He believed? Consequently, would they not be curious enough to inquire what Jesus actually taught from the historical record that has been so transformative? If he were not interested, I would just let it go, for he was not my intended audience anyway, but those who call themselves Christians.

So, Christians, "How can you hold such opinions concerning your heavenly Father, and share them with others as the gospel?" Most will answer, "Because these are things Jesus taught us in His word. We learned them from the Bible."

Therefore, there are two groups representing those whose presentation of Christian doctrine is illustrated by the quotation under discussion. Those who are content with it as accurate and those grieved by it but who do not see how it could be different. To the latter, it may be of some comfort to have one who has studied the Bible for many years and loves it deeply. To declare to you my conviction that there is not an atom of this teaching throughout the whole lovely record we call Scripture. These thoughts are all and altogether the inventions of men, honest men at least in part, but still untrue. Thank God, we do not have to accept man's thoughts of God's acts and ways, however good the man may be that does not bear witness to our consciousness. We do not need to accept others' opinions while not seeing God's goodness in them.

Protests

I desire to protest against these opinions and examine them with those who call themselves Christians. I wish to reason with them to change their minds about the character and nature of God.

Whatever your opinions are on any subject, they are just opinions. So, the question is, can opinions, even the best opinions represent Christianity? If they could, how many of us are such that God would choose us to express His thoughts and intents by our opinions concerning them? Who are there of your friends that you would appoint to represent your deepest thoughts for you? If you answer, "My opinions I hold and by which I represent Christianity are those of the Bible." **I reply that none of us can understand or much less represent the thoughts of another unless they share the same mind. So, is Christianity a system of articles of belief, as correct as our language can state them? Never!** I am so opposed to this that I would rather have a person, as many of you do, who has opinions that seem to me to be untrue and irreverent, but at the same time they lived by the faith of the Son of God. One who trusted the Father as Jesus trusted Him, rather than to have a person whose every opinion and belief aligned with mine but knew nothing of a daily relationship and walk with God. The first who holds doctrines of devils is a child of God. The second who has the doctrines of Christ and His apostles is of the world, of the devil.

"How, you ask, can a person hold doctrines of devils but be a child of God?" The answer is simple. Just because you hold an opinion with your intellect does not mean you believe in it. A person's actual

beliefs are the ones by which they live. As Christians, we live by the love of God and obedience to His will so far as we understand it. Our awful doctrines are outside of us even if we think they are inside and are not true. Principles cannot be inside anyone, for they are just ways of thinking, not living. These doctrines about God are sadly against us in the end, for no one can love doctrines as he loves his God and Savior. What a person believes is what he does. A reasonable person would withdraw with hatred from actions that we think God is justified in doing. Like our good God, we love, help and save. Will God let a person's wrong opinions damn him? No, no more than He will save him who has correct views who lives for himself. For damnation is the best the one who lives for himself can receive.

The conclusion I have reached and insist upon is that no theory can make you a Christian even if they are right and contain all that can be believed. On the contrary, these theories are what keep many of you from being a Christian. When you say that, to be saved, a person must hold this or that doctrine, then you are leaving out the essential part of a relationship with the Living God and His will. Instead, you put your trust in some doctrine about Him and His will.

To make my meaning clearer, some say you must profess trust in the finished work of Christ, or faith is in the merits of Christ, or the atonement, He has made by His shed blood. All these statements are denials of the truth of a relationship with our Father in whom we are to believe. Only, by His presence with and in us, and our obedience to Him are we lifted out of darkness into Light. No type or amount of belief about Him is the faith of the New Testament.

"While the mind is occupied with inquiring, "Do I believe or feel this doctrine is right?" The real question is forgotten, "Have I left all to follow Him?"

To those who give themselves in relationship to God, every belief will come right. Jesus will see to it that our believing in Himself will be correct. If we cannot trust Him in this, what claim can we make of faith in Him at all? **It is because we have so little trust that we cling to doctrines and traditions of men concerning our Father. The living Christ is to these but a shadow. They all but eliminate Christ by their theories about Him, as One who can be believed in completely. These disciples are those who rest on his finished work, his merits, or his atonement instead of Him!**

I insist that a person's faith should be in the living, loving, helping, and ruling Jesus. The one devoted to us as much as ever. That is the one with all the power of the Trinity for the salvation of His brethren. It is not trusting that He did this or that - it is faith in the Son who does and is doing everything for us who will save us. Without this faith, this trust in Jesus, we cannot be healed!

You ask, "What is faith in Him?" I answer, leaving your way, your things, yourself, and taking His and Him! Faith is leaving behind your trust in men, in money, in opinions, in character, in atonement itself, and doing what He tells you to do! I can find no words enough to express the weight of this necessity, this obedience. It is one of the terrible heresies of the church that it is always presenting something other than obedience as faith in Christ!"

The work of Christ is not the working of Christ, any more than the clothing of Christ is the body of Christ. If the woman who touched the hem of His garment had trusted in the garment and not in Him who wore it, would she have been healed? And the reason that so many who believe "about" Christ rather than "in" Him get the comfort they do, is that in touching the hem of His garment, they cannot help believing a little more in the live man inside the garment.

Some even ponder the imponderable and ask whether they are of the elect? Whether they have a share in the blood shed for sin? Whether theirs is saving faith? When all the time, He who died for them is waiting for them to get out of the way. First, from themselves, which is consuming them with doubts about their salvation, and then He can set them free and take them home to His Father and theirs. If only they would obey what He says to them, which is the beginning, middle, and end of faith instead of searching into the mysteries of sin and corruption in their own carnal houses, they would but awaken and arise from the dead. That is to come into the light which Christ is waiting to give them. He would begin at once to fill them with the fulness of God.

Primacy of Obedience

"But I do not know how to awaken and arise!"

I will tell you. Get up and do something the Master tells you to do, so make of yourself His disciple at once. Instead of asking yourself if you believe or not, ask yourself if you have done one thing today because He said, "Do this", or once abstained because He said, "Do not do that." It is simply ridiculous to think you believe, or even want to believe in Him if you do not obey Him. If you can think of nothing where He has influenced your actions one way or the other, then you have reasonable grounds to consider you are no follower of His at all.

However, you can remedy this at once, become a "follower" by following Him in the first thing you can think of where you are not. We must learn to obey Him in everything by starting somewhere. Begin at once with that, then follow it with the next thing that lies at the door of your conscience! Oh, what fools and slow of heart we are, supposing we are thinking of nothing but Christ, but not setting ourselves to obey His words, so building our houses on the sand! (Matthew 7:24-27 NAS)

Some teachers have turned people away from these direct words of Jesus that are spirit and life! Turned them to consider plans of salvation tortured out of the words of His apostles. Plans that are scripture but misleading! There is but one plan of salvation, and that is to trust in the Lord Jesus Christ! That is to take Him as our Master and His words as our Way of Life. This trusting is to enter into a Life-giving relationship with Him, and this obedience is the only way to oneness.

The relationship between Him and us is a certain one, but we cannot begin to live in it without obedience. Obedience is the life of it. There can be no truth, no reality, found in atonement with Him that is not grounded in obedience. What? Have I a flawed idea of God? One that is not, from the first, doing as He does? To think otherwise is absurd and comes from the father of lies.

I know what the enemy whispers to us who find teaching on obedience distasteful. "It is a 'doctrine' of works!" Being a disciple, a follower of Christ, is not about Law or a way of thinking but a way of Life. One word from Jesus humbly heard and received is enough to send demons of false theology into hell. Jesus says of the person who does not do His commandments that his spiritual house will fall into utter ruin. Jesus instructs His disciples to go and make disciples, ". . . teaching them to follow all that I have commanded you." (Matthew. 28: 20 NAS). You say, but it is faith that is required. Yes, but is not faith the highest thing the human mind is capable of? But faith in what? Faith in Him, in what He says, a faith expressed in obedience, a faith which is obedience.

What have you done today because it was the will of Christ? Have you dismissed an anxious thought about tomorrow? Have you ministered to anyone in need, either soul or body, and kept your right hand from knowing what your left hand did? Have you judged? Have you coveted? Have you forgiven your enemy? Are you seeking the kingdom before all else? Are you hungering and thirsting after righteousness? Have you given to someone who asked of you?

Tell me something you have done, are doing, or intend to do because He told you to. If you are doing nothing He says, it is no wonder that you cannot trust Him and are driven to seek refuge in the atonement. As if something He had done, and not He Himself in His doing, were the atonement. "This faith is not how I understand it?" What does it matter how you understand it, or even what you understand if you and God are not working together as one? How could you understand?

If you don't obey His teaching, why should I listen to your explanation of it? If you do not do His will, how can you understand Him? If you do not know Him, how could you trust in Him? It is the child's heart that alone understands the Father.

What do you think? Did Jesus ever give a commandment that would not be helpful because it could not be done? He gives us something to do that we must do or be lost. We must follow His commands, for there is no other way to know life and learn about the divine life. He knows that we can try and that He will help us in our trying and failing until we succeed in doing God's will as He does Himself. He will take the trying in the imperfect act and make it perfect in the end.

We must release all our fears and distrust of Christ. We must receive His teaching wholeheartedly and not let other's interpretations make us turn aside. I say "interpretations" for the apostles never taught against Christ, but against others whose expositions are based on understandings rather than obedience.

We may be sure that none will be condemned for a past sin. If they are convicted, it will be because they would not come to the light when the light came to them. After all, they did not turn from evil and do good. Instead, they imputed to themselves righteousness that was not theirs, hid their unbelief in a garment of false faith, and would not obey. They preferred imagining themselves as worthy, to confessing themselves in the wrong and repenting. If a man becomes a disciple of Christ, we can be sure that He will not leave him ignorant about what to believe. He will know the truth about all that he needs to know. If we do as He tells us, His light will grow in our hearts. Till then, we could not understand even if He explained it to us.

Leaving all

I write for the sake of those who have been driven away from God because of false teaching that claims to be true. The presenting of a God that is not worthy of belief. False teaching about our heavenly Father, who is altogether unselfish and good! The God who does all He can for His creatures. This other deity is not the God who made the heavens and the earth, not the Father revealed in Jesus Christ. If we see any darkness in God at all, and especially if we defend such darkness by justifying it as respect for God, we misrepresent Him with our "Lord, Lord!" Having received the truth that God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all, how then can we call any darkness attributed to Him light?

Are any of these teachings ones we should not forsake for Christ? Jesus is Truth, and you cannot know Him any other way! Do you not want to be perfect? Would you rather keep this or that with its imperfections than part with it to be perfect? You cannot know Christ without this letting go, for the very principle of His life was the relational reality of being the perfect son to His Father. The one who will not part with all for Christ is not worthy of Him and cannot know Him.

Our part is to let our light shine, not to force our interpretations of God on others. However, rather than set about to explain the theory of Christianity, what if they instead gave themselves to do the will of their Master? The one purpose for which the gospel was preached to you, how different would be your portion of the world in which you come into contact! Had you given yourself to understanding by doing, rather than mining for information, to support your system, many hearts would know God's love who now remain alone. Then you would have proclaimed the word of Life indeed!

I am addressing those who rejected or were unchanged by your explanations of Christianity. Those who are now free who were attracted by your presentation or pressured to agree with your views. Instead, they will be drawn by the burning bush as Moses was, saying "I must turn aside and see this marvelous sight!" Then they will draw near to see how these Christians love one another and how just and fair they are with all they encountered! How their goods are the best, their scales accurate, their prices reasonable and their word dependable! That their families are wholesome, and they do not love money, but God! In their homes, selfishness is neither hidden nor encouraged. And their children are diligently taught to share, as they are to save, as free of hoarding as of squander. **That in their home's religion is not one thing and daily life another.**

Obedience Leads to Truth

Without obedience, you will find that you cannot trust God in this world, neither trust Him for the next. Refusing to obey Him "in" your life, how could you trust Him "with" your life? Therefore, you try various substitutes for faith in Him. You try holding Him to His word, binding Him with His promises, appealing to the atonement or the satisfaction of His justice, and thinking far more of serving God on Sunday and far less of helping your neighbor during the week.

If any say my teaching is presumptuous and contrary to what was taught in the New Testament, or not what the best of men have always believed, I will not proceed to defend my opinions, beliefs, or even the principles on which I try to live! I will instead appeal to you on whether or not I have spoken the truth to you concerning our highest obligations to live the words of Christ. If not, then I have nothing else to say. We have no common ground on which to meet. If you agree that obedience is our prime obligation, we should obey so that we might come to know Him! And if you are trusting in money, how can you know the living God who alone can be trusted in life!

If we do things that are displeasing to God, believing they are His will, we may still gain by it, for He will use this connection for our good. However, before we can be free in the liberty of Christ, we must be delivered from these errors.

Jesus did not die to give us a heaven of ours or other's invention. He died to provide us with Life, to bring us to the paradise of the Father's peace. His children must participate in the joy of the Father and the Son. This Life is and has been the Father's work from the beginning to bring us into the home of His

heart. This home is our destiny, and no matter how much we resist, we will find it hard to fight against His love. The Father will prod us, if necessary, with unrest and trouble, even hell-fire if nothing else will do. The old spirit of the Pharisees who would not enter and hinder those who would is by no means extinct.

The only thing that can reconcile all differences is to walk in the light. *"So let's keep focused on that goal, those of us who want everything God has for us. If any of you have something else in mind, something less than total commitment, God will clear your blurred vision; you'll see it yet! Now that we are on the right track let's stay on it."* (Philippians 3:15-16 MSG).

In this walking, love will grow, truth will grow, and works will flow from the Spirit He has given us!

CLIFFNOTES WITH ORIGINAL MACDONALD QUOTES

Knowing Jesus Christ

How have we learned Christ? It ought to be a startling thought, that we may have learned him wrong. That must be far worse than not to have learned him at all: his place is occupied by a false Christ, hard to exorcise!

'The visiting on Adam's descendants through hundreds of generations dreadful penalties for a small transgression which they did not commit; the damning of all men who do not avail themselves of an alleged mode of obtaining forgiveness, which most men have never heard of; and the effecting a reconciliation by sacrificing a son who was perfectly innocent, to satisfy the assumed necessity for a propitiatory victim; are modes of action which, ascribed to a human ruler, would call forth expressions of abhorrence; and the ascription of them to the Ultimate Cause of things, even not felt to be full of difficulties, must become impossible.'

Protests

I reply, that none can understand, still less represent, the opinions of another, but such as are of the same mind with him— certainly none who mistake his whole scope and intent so far as in supposing opinion to be the object of any writer in the Bible. Is Christianity a system of articles of belief, let them be correct as language can give them? Never.

'How! a man hold the doctrine of devils, and yet be of God?' Yes; for to hold a thing with the intellect, is not to believe it. A man's real belief is that which he lives by; and that which the man I mean lives by, is the love of God, and obedience to his law, so far as he has recognized it.

What I come to and insist upon is, that, supposing your theories right, and containing all that is to be believed, yet those theories are not what makes you Christians, if Christians indeed you are. On the contrary, they are, with not a few of you, just what keeps you from being Christians. For when you say

that, to be saved, a man must hold this or that, then are you leaving the living God and his will, and putting trust in some notion about him or his will.

“While the mind is occupied in enquiring, 'Do I believe or feel this thing right?'—the true question is forgotten: “Have I left all to follow him?”

It is because he has little or no faith, that he is left clinging to preposterous and dishonouring ideas, the traditions of men concerning his Father, and neither his teaching nor that of his apostles. The living Christ is to them but a shadow; the all but obliterated Christ of their theories no soul can thoroughly believe in: the disciple of such a Christ rests on his work, or his merits, or his atonement!

What I insist upon is, that a man's faith shall be in the living, loving, ruling, helping Christ, devoted to us as much as ever he was, and with all the powers of the Godhead for the salvation of his brethren. It is not faith that he did this, that his work wrought that—it is faith in the man who did and is doing everything for us that will save him: without this he cannot work to heal spiritually, any more than he would heal physically, when he was present to the eyes of men.

Do you ask, 'What is faith in him?' I answer, The leaving of your way, your objects, your self, and the taking of his and him; the leaving of your trust in men, in money, in opinion, in character, in atonement itself, and doing as he tells you. I can find no words strong enough to serve for the weight of this necessity—this obedience. It is the one terrible heresy of the church, that it has always been presenting something else than obedience as faith in Christ.

The work of Christ is not the Working Christ, any more than the clothing of Christ is the body of Christ.

Some even ponder the imponderable— whether they are of the elect, whether they have an interest in the blood shed for sin, whether theirs is a saving faith—when all the time the man who died for them is waiting to begin to save them from every evil—and first from this self which is consuming them with trouble about its salvation; he will set them free, and take them home to the bosom of the Father—if only they will mind what he says to them—which is the beginning, middle, and end of faith. If, instead of searching into the mysteries of corruption in their own charnel-houses, they would but awake and arise from the dead, and come out into the light which Christ is waiting to give them, he would begin at once to fill them with the fulness of God.

Primacy of Obedience

You can begin at once to make it true, to be a disciple of the Living One—by obeying him in the first thing you can think of in which you are not obeying him. We must learn to obey him in everything, and so must begin somewhere: let it be at once, and in the very next thing that lies at the door of our conscience! Oh fools and slow of heart, if you think of nothing but Christ, and do not set yourselves to do his words! you but build your houses on the sand.

What have such teachers not to answer for who have turned your regard away from the direct words of the Lord himself, which are spirit and life, to contemplate plans of salvation tortured out of the words of his apostles, even were those plans as true as they are false! There is but one plan of salvation, and that is to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ; that is, to take him for what he is—our master, and his words as if

he meant them, which assuredly he did. To do his words is to enter into vital relation with him, to obey him is the only way to be one with him.

The relation between him and us is an absolute one; it can nohow begin to live but in obedience: it is obedience. There can be no truth, no reality, in any initiation of atonement with him, that is not obedience. What! have I the poorest notion of a God, and dare think of entering into relations with him, the very first of which is not that what he saith, I will do? The thing is eternally absurd, and comes of the father of lies.

I know what he whispers to those to whom such teaching as this is distasteful: 'It is the doctrine of works!' But one word of the Lord humbly heard and received will suffice to send all the demons of false theology into the abyss. He says the man that does not do the things he tells him, builds his house to fall in utter ruin. He instructs his messengers to go and baptize all nations, 'teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you.' Tell me it is faith he requires: do I not know it? and is not faith the highest act of which the human mind is capable? But faith in what? Faith in what he is, in what he says—a faith which can have no existence except in obedience—a faith which is obedience.

Knowing that you do not heed his word, why should I heed your explanation of it? You do not his will, and so you cannot understand him; you do not know him, that is why you cannot trust in him. You think your common sense enough to let you know what he means? Your common sense ought to be enough to know itself unequal to the task. It is the heart of the child that alone can understand the Father.

Leaving All

To let their light shine, not to force on them their interpretations of God's designs, is the duty of Christians towards their fellows. If you who set yourselves to explain the theory of Christianity, had set yourselves instead to do the will of the Master, the one object for which the Gospel was preached to you, how different would now be the condition of that portion of the world with which you come into contact! Had you given yourselves to the understanding of his word that you might do it, and not to the quarrying from it of material wherewith to buttress your systems, in many a heart by this time would the name of the Lord be loved where now it remains unknown. The word of life would then by you have been held out indeed.

That in no house of theirs was religion one thing, and the daily life another.

Obedience Leads to Truth

But you find that, unable to trust him for this world, neither can you trust him for the world to come. Refusing to obey him in your life, how can you trust him for your life? Hence the various substitutes you seek for faith in him: you would hold him to his word, bind him by his promises, appeal to the atonement, to the satisfaction made to his justice, as you call it . . . thinking far less of serving God on the Sunday, and far more of serving your neighbour in the week.

The one only thing truly to reconcile all differences is, to walk in the light. So St Paul teaches us in his epistle to the Philippians, the third chapter and sixteenth verse. After setting forth the loftiest idea of human endeavour in declaring the summit of his own aspiration, he says—not, 'This must be your

endeavour also, or you cannot be saved;' but, 'If in anything ye be otherwise minded, God shall reveal even this unto you. Nevertheless whereto we have already attained, let us walk by that same.'

In such walking, and in such walking only, love will grow, truth will grow; the soul, . . . works along with the spirit he has created.