

A Christian's Job Description

John 15:9-17

When we're looking to hire someone for a job, we usually prepare a job description. We want the potential employee to know what the job involves, what will be expected of him or her. They need to know the qualifications for the job, skills desired, the duties they'll have to perform. Here at Covenant we have job descriptions for the pastor, the youth director, custodian, secretary, and so on. I'm sure for many of you it's the same at your place of employment. You have a job description so you know what's expected of you, what you're supposed to be doing.

Our text this morning from John 15 might be considered a job description for the Christian. What does God expect of us? What does God want us to do? Are we living lives that are pleasing to God? Are we making full use of the blessings and opportunities God is giving us? Together let's consider these questions and explore this job description for the Christian.

This passage contains a number of commands and we'll get to those. But I think it's interesting to look at the first verse and last verse of this text. It's one long paragraph and in verse 9, the first verse of the text, Jesus says, "As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you." And then look at the last verse, verse 17, "This is my command: Love each other. This text, this passage of Scripture, is bracketed by love, love is the beginning and love the end. First Jesus declares to every one of you here today and everyone in the whole world – I love you. That's what the cross means. I love you. That's what the empty tomb means with the stone rolled away from the entrance. I love you. "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have everlasting life."

First, we understand that God loves us. That's the foundation, that's the starting point. God loves the whole world and therefore He sent His Son to be the Savior from sin. Then as a response to God's love for us, because He first loved us, we love Him and we love one another. So it's a love story from beginning to end!

Jesus starts with this statement, "As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you." And then He gives a command, the first part of the job description. "Now remain in my love." What does that mean? Remain in my love? We remain in his love when we cling to Jesus as our Lord and Savior, when we stand firm in the Christian faith. In our Gospel lesson last Sunday, Jesus said, "I am the vine you are the branches." We remain in his love when we stay connected to Jesus, our source of life and salvation.

You have been brought to faith in Jesus through the Word and water of baptism and by the power of the Holy Spirit. God has claimed you as His own child. Because of the love of Jesus, you have been saved from sin and brought into the family of God. You have received the love of Jesus. Now the challenge is to remain in his love.

How do you do that? You do that when you continue to read and study and hear and share the Word of God. You do that when you talk to God on a regular basis, when you keep the lines of communication open, and share with God your needs and fears as well as your joys and thanksgivings. You do that when you continue to worship and praise your God with other Christians. You do that when you receive again and again the body and blood of Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. Those are all very important ways to remain in the Savior's love, to keep your faith alive and growing.

Here's how God will measure that and here's how the world will know that you remain in his love. Jesus says, "If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love." Commands. Commandments. That sounds familiar doesn't it? We've heard that somewhere before. You shall have no other gods before me. Remember the Sabbath Day by keeping it holy. You shall not kill. You shall not steal. You shall not covet. We know all the commandments.

Now we need to be very careful here. I don't want anyone to think . . . God loves me if I keep the commandments. God will let me into heaven if I keep the commandments. I'll have no trouble in life if I keep the commandments. We're not saved by keeping the commandments. We're not saved by anything we do. We sin. We all sin. By ourselves there's no way we can keep all those commandments and please God. We can't do what's required of us in that job description. So God sent His Son Jesus to do what we couldn't do. He sent His Son to keep the commandments for us. He sent His son to offer His life on the cross as payment for our sins. Jesus paid for our sins in full. In him we have forgiveness. In him we have eternal life. We are saved by graced through faith in Jesus Christ.

Now as a response to what God has first done for us, we obey his commands. The English translation we have is a little misleading. We don't obey his commands or go to church or serve the Lord as a way to get God's attention, as a way to earn or merit God's blessings. Because God has poured out his love for us in Jesus, because we are saved by grace through faith in Jesus, we worship and serve and obey his commands. Salvation comes first. Faith comes first and then we live out the faith God has created in us by keeping the commandments.

When we remain in God's love and keep his commands, we will have joy. Jesus says in verse 11, "I have said this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete." Some people think that

Christians don't have any fun, or can't have any fun. All those rules, don't do this and don't do that. But the rules God gives to us, His commands, are for our good and our blessing. They teach us how to have a good, healthy, loving relationships, how to get along with God and with others. Think of what a wonderful place this world would be if everyone obeyed the commands of God – do not murder, do not steal, do not commit adultery, do not covet, do not slander others. Think of how different our city would be, our schools would be, if everyone followed the fruits of the Spirit – love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, self-control. And of course the summary and the center of the commandments is love. When someone asked Jesus, "What is the greatest commandment? Jesus said, `The greatest commandment is this – love the Lord with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. And the second is like it – love your neighbor as yourself.'" The command of Christ to all of His people is to love one another.

Following the commands of God brings joy to our hearts and joy to our lives. The Psalmist writes, "How sweet are your promises to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth! Your Word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path. Your statutes are my heritage forever; they are the joy of my heart." We are blessed, life is good, when we keep the commands of God.

And now we come to verse 13. Now I know the verse numberings and paragraph numbers of the Bible are not divinely inspired. When Matthew and Mark and Luke and John were writing the Gospels, when Paul was writing his letters, they didn't number their sentences. But I think this is interesting. There are nine verses in our Gospel lesson today. Verse 13 is in the center. Four verses before it and four verses after. And look again at verse 13. "Greater love has no one than this that he lay down his life for his friends." That's the exact center of this Gospel text, and it's also the center of our Christian faith and the source of our Christian hope. We are sinners, hopelessly lost. And Jesus laid down his life for us. He died and rose again to pay for our sins and bring us into the kingdom of God. In 1 John 4 we read: "This is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins."

Love is the mark of the Christian and that love is demonstrated in sacrifice and service. As we share our blessings with others, as we give of our time and our treasures, we are laying down our lives for others. Love doesn't take, love gives. We don't love to get something, but to give something.

Ages ago there was a daughter of a princess who was deathly ill with diphtheria. The mother was forbidden to kiss the child because of the almost certain danger of contracting the illness. In one of the many moments of pain for the child, the mother was so distressed that she took her daughter in her arms and held her close and got her to stop crying. The daughter looked into the eyes of her mother and said,

“Mama, kiss me.” That was too much for the mother’s heart. She picked up her child again and pressed her to her body and kissed her. It was the kiss of death. Love is sacrifice without counting the cost.

I want you to know today that being a Christian doesn’t come without cost. There is a cost to following Jesus. But it’s not money. God doesn’t need your money; He wants your heart. He wants your life devoted to Him. I don’t want you to take this lightly. This is really serious stuff. The rite of confirmation contains these words: “Do you intend to remain strong in your faith and committed to Christ’s Church and to suffer anything, even death, rather than fall away from it?” I hope and pray that you won’t have to suffer death for the sake of your faith in Jesus. But many have in the past and some still do today in different parts of the world. As a follower of Jesus Christ, you do have to make sacrifices, to give up some things. Someone has said that Christians are to lose themselves or give themselves in love and service to God. You need to understand that the world does not revolve around me. It’s not all about me. It’s about others – loving others, serving others, helping others. This Christian life we live is about loving others so that we might help connect them to Jesus and his love.

Now let’s look at verse 14. Jesus says you are my friends. Once we were enemies of God, separated from Him, sinners, unbelievers, but now we are friends. Jesus laid down his life for his friends. He died to pay for our sins. He restores us to a loving relationship with Him and brings us into God’s family. It’s good to have friends. We need friends. There’s quite a distinction between friends and servants.

A servant or slave has no choice. The master gives the order and the slave has to do it or else. We are not slaves but friends. Jesus considers us his friends, like part of the family. We don’t love and serve him out of compulsion or out of a sense of duty. No, we love and serve him and we love and serve each other because we want to, because the Spirit lives in us. It’s what we do.

And then in verse 16 Jesus says, “You did not choose me but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit.” We’ve been chosen by God for a reason, for a purpose. I hear a lot of people say – I don’t know my purpose in life. Why am I here? Jesus tells us right here – You were made for a purpose and that purpose is to bear fruit. That term “bear fruit” simply means to do good works, to serve others. What can you do to serve someone else today, this week? How can you brighten someone’s day? Encourage someone who is down? How can you share the love of Christ with someone else, maybe someone who doesn’t know Jesus?

Well that’s it, that’s the job description for the Christian. God loves us and he sent His Son to save us from sin. We have been redeemed by the blood of Christ, saved by grace through faith in Jesus. Now

he has a job for us to do. First, remain in His love – worship, prayer, Scripture. Second, love one another - reach out, serve, give, share, connect people to Jesus.

My prayer for you today is that you'll take to heart this job description for the Christian, that you will always remain in the Savior's love, that you will worship him and obey his commands. And then empowered by the Spirit of God, I pray that you will bear fruit and love one another.