

**Fix your Attention on Jesus**

November 25th, 2012, Bible Camp at Los Angeles  
 Gotthold Beck

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1Peter

1:8 Though you have not seen him, you love him.  
 And even though you do not see him now, you  
 believe in him and rejoice with an indescribable and  
 glorious joy.  
 [International Standard Version]

I would like to begin today's sermon with this poetry  
 chiseled on the wall of an old house in Southern  
 Germany, which was built several hundred years ago;

You call me Master ... but obey me not.  
 You call me Light ... but see me not.  
 You call me Way ... but walk me not.  
 You call me Life ... but desire me not.  
 You call me Wise ... but follow me not.  
 You call me Fair ... but love me not.  
 You call me Rich ... but ask me not.  
 You call me Eternal ... but seek me not.  
 You call me Gracious ... but trust me not.  
 (You call me Noble ... but serve me not.)  
 You call me Mighty ... but honor me not.  
 You call me Just ... but fear me not.  
 If I condemn you ... blame me Not!

Maybe we can add a few lines to the bottom;

*You attend Bible Camps ... but listen to me not,  
 repent not.  
 So I can't bless you.  
 I can neither reveal my strength, nor let you serve  
 me.*

It will be nothing but a tragedy if He has to say these  
 words to us.

Back in these days, Peter sent the following words to  
 those brothers and sisters who were persecuted  
 because of their faith; "You love Jesus Christ", which  
 we just read from the First Epistle of Peter, Chapter 1,  
 Verse 8. Could there be anything more encouraging  
 than that?

King Solomon is undoubtedly one of the most  
 significant persons in the Old Testament. He was such  
 a brilliant man. He unified the world of those days. It  
 was accomplished without war, without shedding

blood. In the Bible, his most important quality is  
 explained in a simple sentence in the First Kings,  
 Chapter 3, Verse 3; "Solomon loved the Lord." Period.  
 He was the wisest king. He was also very wealthy.  
 However, these factors did not matter at all.

In actuality, the criterion of the Bible, the criterion of  
 the Lord was that Solomon loved the Lord. Peter said  
 the same to persecuted brothers and sisters; "you all  
 love Jesus Christ." They accepted the presence of  
 Jesus, not only because they believed in Jesus, but  
 because they loved Him.

Even among those who don't read the Bible, these  
 words are well known; "God is love." The Lord God is  
 love itself. When we think of this fact, as we just did,  
 we are compelled to be thankful and worship Him.

Jesus Himself, who came down to this sinful world and  
 was handed over to death, is the proof of this love.  
 Those who experienced this love will certainly be filled  
 with joy. However, what I would like you to think about  
 today is our attitude toward the Lord, rather than the  
 love of the Lord toward us. In other words, I would like  
 each one of you who has come in today to  
 contemplate whether you truly love the Lord.

What is the most important aspect of our life?  
 Needless to say, we need to find this out and put it into  
 practice. In the time of Jesus, a scholar who was very  
 knowledgeable of the Scripture once asked Him;  
 "Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the  
 Law?"

Matthew

22:32 'I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac,  
 and the God of Jacob'? He is not the God of the  
 dead, but of the living."

The answer of Jesus was that Abraham, Isaac and  
 Jacob were all alive. They had once died but they were  
 still alive.

Matthew

22:33 When the crowds heard this, they were  
 amazed at his teaching.

It is a pity. They did not repent but they were just  
 surprised.

Matthew

22:34 When the Pharisees heard that Jesus had  
 silenced the Sadducees, they met together in the  
 same place.

22:35 One of them, an expert in the Law, tested  
 him by asking,

He had no humility to beg and ask what had to be done to be saved.

**Matthew**  
22:36 "Teacher,....

This in reality was feigned respect. He called the Lord 'teacher', but he neither had any reverence for the Lord nor willingness to ask for His guidance as to what was actually required of him.

**Matthew**  
22:36 ....which is the greatest commandment in the Law?"  
22:37 Jesus told him,....

Isn't it impressive? Jesus answered him instead of neglecting him. If it was us, we would have simply refused him, calling him a hypocrite with no ears to hear. But, Jesus didn't. Jesus did not neglect his question. Jesus simply quoted these verses from the Old Testament;

**Matthew**  
22:37 ....You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.  
22:38 This is the greatest and most important commandment.  
22:39 The second is exactly like it: 'You must love your neighbor as yourself.'  
22:40 All the Law and the Prophets depend on these two commandments."

What is the greatest and the most important commandment? Jesus answered this question by quoting this verse from the Old Testament; "Love your God."

It is written that the crowds were utterly amazed at Jesus' teaching. However, Jesus was not there to teach. No one can be saved by studying what Jesus said. Jesus is not a road-sign. He is the way itself. Jesus wants to manifest Himself to us. After all, Jesus did not require people to understand any specific doctrine. He just wanted to draw them near to Himself. I know you are so tired, distressed and lonely. I will be waiting for you to come to me.

When we come near to Jesus, we feel His love. We are liberated and rejoice from our hearts. Bible scholars of these times studied the Scripture very diligently. Nevertheless, they did not understand the true teachings of the Bible at all. As I just mentioned, the core of the Bible is not any specific doctrine. Rather, it is the savior Jesus, the promised redeemer. The eyes of the scholars of these times were closed to Jesus.

A scribe came to see to Jesus. This man had no intention of learning from Him or asking Him to reveal the truth; instead, he approached Jesus to test Him with the purpose of humiliating Him.

The Lord God desires people to love Him. Isn't it amazing? This is the mission given to us. We are allowed to have a relationship of love with the Lord God. The Lord does not demand love from creations other than human beings such as the angels. All that is demanded from them is obedience to the Lord. They are expected to show unconditional obedience. However, from us, He demands more than that. That is to say, we are expected to love the Lord, who is our God. Jesus stressed that this is the greatest and the most important commandment.

After all, the Lord God seeks undivided and true love from us. The Lord desires sincere love that comes from deep within our hearts. The commandments of the Lord don't put us on a leash but rather, they liberate us from bondage and fulfill our hearts. The Lord won't let us choose as to whether we love Him or not. He commands us to love Him. Why is that? Because only when we do so, we will discover fulfillment of life, perfect joy and true freedom.

The Lord is the great Creator who made all things exist through His will. This Lord is the God of each one of us regardless of whether we believe it or not, whether we want to accept it or not. However, this great Creator is at the same time our savior. The Lord is not indifferent to anyone. Each one of us is beloved by this savior. This is the great news of the gospel that the Bible tells us.

The Bible clearly states that the Lord God is love. In other words, true love only comes from God. There is no true love without God. True love and the Lord God are indivisible from each other. The Lord God is love itself. It is nowhere written in the Bible that the God produces love or the God sends love. The God just reveals his love toward us.

**1 John**  
3:16 This is how we have come to know love: the Messiah gave his life for us. We, too, ought to give our lives for our brothers.

The Lord sacrificed His own life for us. Paul, former Saul, who later wrote most of the epistles in the New Testament, not only hated Jesus for a long time, but used to persecute His followers. No one could persuade him and bring him back from the wrong path. However, he was ultimately transformed to the greatest proclaimer of Jesus in the world. Why was it

possible? He explained it in one sentence in this famous verse 20 of Galatians, Chapter 2:

#### Galatians

2:20 ...I live by the faithfulness of the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

He went through an instant change. He understood at that moment that Jesus was nailed on the cross, but not because he was a criminal, a swindle, or liar. He realized that Jesus came back to life and He was still alive. The living God truly became a man. The true living God took the punishment we deserved on Himself. The Lord God paid the price all by Himself for our salvation—Paul was surely overwhelmed by this love. This love changed Paul's life fundamentally. It urged him to give up his life and sacrifice everything to proclaim his love to others.

What does the cross tell us? I am your creator and I am your savior. I sacrificed myself for you and became a man of pain, a man of sorrow. I was cursed. I was made a sin offering — all this to pay the price of your salvation. Because true living God is love itself and he sacrificed Himself for us. Thus, the Lord has every right to demand our love. The true living God, who loved us as much as He could, now commands us; because I am love, you shall love me too.

Here the next question arises. What kind of people can love the Lord with all their heart? The answer is clear. It is those who have had a personal experience with the Lord. Some of you who have come here today may not have experienced the love of Jesus yet, may not have encountered Jesus. So, this is what we should ask the Lord; please reveal your true love to us. Lord, please give us what you want us to have, which is forgiveness of sins, true peace of mind, ever-lasting joy and lively hope.

What we need to do is not to have a religion, not to belong to some church, not to be baptized, and not to make an effort to become more righteous than others. It is just to experience the love of the Lord God, that is to say, to come to Jesus as sinners burdened with sins and debts and ask for His forgiveness. What we need is not to study or understand some specific teachings, but rather to know the love of the Lord through personal experience and immerse ourselves in that love.

This was why Jesus clearly said, *“You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. This is the greatest and most important commandment.”* But, sincere people are already aware that it is not possible to obey the law and commandments of the Lord on their own. We all

should rather draw near to Jesus and confess, *“I am sincerely trying to obey. But I know I can't. It is not possible for me. I am a loser. Without your help, it is absolutely impossible. I realize that there is nothing good dwelling in me.”*

When you rely on your own strength alone, you can only live a self-centered life.

It is mostly seen as disgraceful for anyone to surrender to something in front of others. If someone tells you to hold on and do your best in a situation, you would feel encouraged. Contrarily, if you are told to surrender yourself, you would feel insulted. Many kinds of so-called religions are much easier to accept for people. It is because all man-made religions place humans at the center and implore them to exert themselves. Contrarily, the true living God desires humans to admit their weakness, proclaim their surrender to Him outwardly and to be broken down inwardly.

Those who love Jesus desire to place Him at the center of their life. Those who don't love Jesus want to stay at the center of their own lives. John the Baptist was a man who loved Jesus. He sincerely confessed that he was willing for Jesus to increase and for himself to decrease. All things done without love for Jesus are deeds of flesh. And nothing good comes out of the flesh.

One thing is clear; we are all so useless. Humans are totally corrupt. They only think of themselves, and thus, they are unable to love the Lord on their own. However, when they confess their debts, proclaim their own inability and come to the Lord Jesus just as they are, they all share the same experience. That is to say, Jesus never fails to accept all who come to Him, Jesus cancels all debts if we confess to Him, and Jesus helps us to renew ourselves from inside and out. Romans, Chapter 5, Verse 5 is a wonderful verse;

#### Romans

5:5 Now this hope does not disappoint us, because God's love....

It refers to the love that God Himself has for us.

5:5 ....has been poured out into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.

The love of the Lord Himself is given to all believers and thus we too love the Lord. When David was released from the emptiness of life and a morass of sins, he loved the Lord. His confession can be found in Psalm 18, verse 1 and 2. This is an amazing confession.

## Psalms

18:1 He said: "I love you, Lord, my strength.

He loved the Lord from the bottom of his heart.

## Psalms

18:2 The Lord is my rock, my fortress, my deliverer, my God, my stronghold in whom I take refuge, my shield, the glory of my salvation, and my high tower."

David not only confessed by word, but he really felt that way deep in his heart; "I worship you, Lord."

Why did David love the Lord so much? The answer is clear. It was because the Lord forgave all his sins. He committed the sin of adultery. Furthermore, to cover up this first sin, he arranged the death of the man with whose wife he had committed adultery. All efforts he made to cancel this debt only led to more debts. There was only one way to escape from such a miserable situation.

Solomon, son of David wrote;

## Proverbs

28:13 Whoever hides his transgressions will not succeed, but whoever confesses and forsakes them will find mercy.

This is a fact that everybody should be aware of. Whoever hides will not succeed. It will all be revealed someday. However, we are not forgiven automatically just because all our sins are revealed. John emphasized the same thing in his first epistle.

## 1 John

1:9 If we make it our habit to confess our sins, in his faithful righteousness he forgives us for those sins and cleanses us from all unrighteousness.

1:7 But if we keep living in the light as he himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.

The King David was determined to walk this way.

## Psalms

32:3 When I kept silent about my sin,....

In other words, when he was trying to hide his transgressions

32:3 ....my body wasted away by my groaning all day long.

32:4 For your hand was heavy upon me day and

night; my strength was exhausted as in a summer drought.

32:5 My sin I acknowledged to you; my iniquity I did not hide. I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the Lord." And you forgave the guilt of my sin!

Consequently, David was released and sung this song filled with joy;

## Psalms

32:1 How blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered.

32:2 How blessed is the person against whom the Lord does not charge iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit.

This gospel can also be found in other parts of the Old Testament as we know;

## Isaiah

57:15 For this is what the high and lofty One says, who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: "He lives in the height and in holiness, and also with the one who is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite."

Paul was given the privilege to have the same experience. He came to love Jesus wholeheartedly. It is clear from these words of his; "*The Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.*" Paul was overwhelmed by the love of Jesus. He could say that "*The love of the Messiah controls me*", by which he meant; "I experienced the love of the Lord. I am filled with joy. I am compelled to rejoice and thank the Lord for everything He has done for me".

In his epistle to Philippians which was written from jail, he also mentioned;

## Philippians

3:7 But whatever things were assets to me, these I now consider a loss for the sake of the Messiah.  
3:8 What is more, I continue to consider all these things to be a loss for the sake of what is far more valuable, knowing the Messiah Jesus, my Lord. It is because of him that I have experienced the loss of all those things. Indeed, I consider them rubbish in order to gain the Messiah

Why did Paul love Jesus so sincerely? It was because he was forgiven for many of his sins. As I just said, David and Paul were two people who loved the Lord wholeheartedly. So, their lives were filled with blessings. How about our lives? Lack of wholehearted love for the Lord is the cause of all our agonies, isn't it?

Revelation, Chapter 2, Verse 4 offers harsh words to us. Brothers and sisters in Ephesus actually belonged to the most brilliant believers of their days who desired to live entirely for the Lord. To these people, the Lord adjured;

#### Revelation

2:4: However, I have this against you: You have abandoned the love you had at first.

2:5 Therefore, remember how far you have fallen. Repent and go back to what you were doing at first. If you don't, I will come to you and remove your lamp stand from its place—unless you repent.

In other words, God will never use them for His work because they were too useless to serve Him.

What was the 'the love you had at first'? It refers to fellowship with Jesus, without which they would not desire anything and they would not accomplish anything. If in each and every day of our life, the Bible is the fountain of our strength, reason for consolation as well as source of joy, and if Jesus is at the center of everything we plan to do, it is a proof that the love we had at first is still within us. It is an important condition for our lamp stand not to be removed from its place.

However, brothers and sisters in Ephesus did not live in intimate fellowship with Jesus in their hearts. Because of this, Jesus had no choice but to tell them, "I can't stay by your side anymore. You are against me. I can't use you anymore. I cannot bless you either." Although the flock in the Ephesus externally appeared to be getting along well, it did not satisfy the Lord. They had zeal and patience and were willing to endure ordeals. However, these were not good enough to replace the love they had at first; in other words, devotion for Jesus. Jesus desires to receive our love and our hearts in His hands more than anything. Those who do not rely on Jesus for everything are considered to have abandoned the love they had at first.

For brothers and sisters of Ephesus, it must have been an unimaginable blessing that Jesus had mercy on them, that they were embraced and liberated by Jesus and that they were allowed to serve Him. However, their gratitude for such blessings went away over time. Losing the love they had at first does not mean to cast that love away, but it is to forget the love they received.

We gather every Sunday to attend the sacrament of the Lord's supper as we just did this morning. This is done so as not to forget the love we had at first like the flock of believers in Ephesus did. It is to always remember the suffering of the Lord, His death, His grace as well as His love. We should always renew our

gratitude to the grace of the Lord and worship the Lord sincerely.

We should ask Jesus every day; Do you see something in us that doesn't match your intentions? However, if we don't manage to have some quiet time in front of the Lord every day, the Lord cannot clarify whether He sees something that doesn't match His intention for us or not.

What is the significance of the "love you had at first"? [In that kind of love], we calm ourselves down at the feet of the Lord. We surrender ourselves to the Lord. We rely thoroughly on the Lord alone. In addition, we obey His will and trust in the Lord and his guidance.

Those who do not read His words with hunger and thirst do not love the Lord in the true sense. "Speak, Lord, because your servant is listening." Not until we have this attitude can the Lord talk to us, reveal His will to us or let us realize the greatness of His love. The love we had at first lets us place Jesus at the center of our life. And it should not be a one-time event but has to continue throughout our lives.

What is it that is truly required of us? It is that everything in our lives needs to be derived from the fellowship with Jesus. A real life example of such love "at first" can be found in the sister called Mary who appears in Luke, chapter 10. Her love for Jesus prevailed over everything. She sat down at Jesus' feet and listened to Him. She poured the most expensive perfume on the Lord. She did not care what others would think; instead she only sought how best she could fulfill the intention of Jesus.

#### Colossians

3:23 Whatever you do, work at it wholeheartedly as though you were doing it for the Lord and not merely for people.

#### 2 Corinthians

5:9 So whether we are at home or away from home, our goal is to be pleasing to him.

The 'love at first' was undivided love for the Lord. It refers to true humility. It means to obey without hesitation, to long for the second coming of Jesus wholeheartedly and to have sincere love for all brothers and sisters. Have we lost the love we had at first?

Those who love Jesus want to depend on no one but Him. Those who love Jesus want to rely completely on the Lord alone. Those who love Jesus desire to stay close to Him. Those who love Jesus hope to have fellowship with Him at any expense. Those who love

Jesus simply want Him to be pleased. Those who love Jesus aspire to live for nobody but Him. What we can say for sure is that those who love Jesus will have His mercy and blessings. Those who love Jesus will be protected and they will be filled with joy. Those who love Jesus will have the eyes of their hearts open and will be guided by Him. So, what is the most important commandment we have to follow? It is to “fix our attention on Jesus.”

End