

Living Like Jesus
1 John 2:3-11
February 25, 2018

1 John 2:6 says, **Whoever claims to live in him must live as Jesus did.** So, I've titled this morning's message, **Living Like Jesus.** That sounds pretty tough though doesn't it? I mean, can you and I, mere mortals, really live like Jesus? One of my favorite Christian artists is Rich Mullins. He passed away in 1997. I imagine he and King David have written some amazing music together by



now. One of the many songs Rich wrote while he was on this earth is simply entitled, **Hard.**¹ Some of the lyrics go like this:

Well I am a good Midwestern boy I give an honest day's work if I can get it. I don't cheat on my taxes, I don't cheat on my girl, I've got values that would make the White House jealous. Well I do get a little much over-impressed, 'Til I think of Peter and Paul and the apostles. I don't stack up too well against

them I guess, but by the standards 'round here I ain't doing that awful. Lord it's hard to turn the other cheek, hard to bless when others curse you. Oh Lord it's hard to be a man of peace, Lord it's hard oh it's hard. You know it's hard to be like Jesus.

I'd ask again. Can you and I, mere mortals, really live like Jesus? Well, the Apostle John seems to think that we can. In fact, in 1 John 2:6, he tells us we must. If John is telling us that we must live like Jesus, then we should clarify how Jesus lived during His earthly life. Without spending a lot of time on this, let's agree that Jesus lived obediently. Philippians 2:8 describes just how obedient Jesus truly was, **And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death— even death on a cross!**² Despite the pain of His torture and His beating. Despite the ridicule of His tormentors and the crowd. Despite the humiliation of His crucifixion by hanging almost naked on the cross for all to see. Jesus was obedient to God, even to the point of death. Now that's obedience!

We are called to live like Jesus, obediently. As a church, we promote the supremacy of Christ by obeying His truth. It's striking to consider that the Apostle John, who was a direct eyewitness of Jesus' earthly life, was compelled to write 1 John 2:6, **Whoever claims to live in him must live as Jesus did.** John doesn't even flinch when he writes this. There is no equivocation, no limiting adjectives or adverbs. He writes to these dear Bros/Sis in Christ and tells them, **You must live as Jesus did.** A few verses earlier, 1 John 2:3 says, **We know that we have come to know him if we keep his commands.** Obedience is a key part of the Christian life.³ But we should not think that this verse is saying that any **true Christian** will always perfectly obey. The immediate context of 1 Jn. 2:1 rules this out, **if anybody does sin, we have an advocate.** So, John is not suggesting perfect obedience, but he is saying that those who know Jesus will live lives that are generally characterized by keeping his commands.⁴

Our initial reaction to a call to obedience can sometimes be weariness or sadness. **Oh man, here we go again, another sermon on how I don't measure up.** But, that's not what this morning's text is about. You see, the Apostle John was an eyewitness of Jesus, he literally walked right next to Jesus. So John knew firsthand that Jesus' message was never one that called for toilsome religiosity. Obedience is not burdensome. Jesus says this Himself in places like Matthew 11:28-30, **Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.** Jesus' yoke is easy, meaning it's **easy to bear, having little weight.**⁵

¹ Rich Mullins, Universal Music, Capitol Christian Music Group, off his album *Liturgy, a Legacy, & a Ragamuffin Band* 1993.

² This obedience unto death was inspired by His love for us. It was love that held Jesus on the cross. Believe me, with the power He could wield, those nails couldn't have held Him there. See Matthew 26:53.

³ The history of Israel provides unmistakable evidence that communion and fellowship with God require obedience to his commands. (Akin, D. L. (2001). *1, 2, 3 John* (Vol. 38, p. 91). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers. Quoting from Smalley, *1, 2, 3 John*, 45. R. A. Culpepper, *1, 2, 3 John*, Knox Preaching Guides (Atlanta: John Knox, 1985), 23, 24.)

⁴ See footnote in *NIV Study Bible*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2011, p. 2126.

⁵ *easy* () *having little weight* Fig. easy to bear, insignificant. Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., Bauer, W., & Gingrich, F. W. (2000). *A Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament and other early Christian literature* (3rd ed., p. 314). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

This word *yoke* is a metaphor for the discipleship process. Jesus is saying, *Learn from me.*⁶ Day by day, walk with me and grow in faith. Let me teach you how to be the spiritual man or woman you want to be. When I picture myself trying to live like Jesus and learn from Jesus, I see myself standing next to Jesus.⁷ I put on his yoke and I see that I am not alone in this yoke. Most yokes were built for two, so I am on one side of the yoke and Jesus is standing next to me on the other side of the yoke. That's why Jesus' yoke is so easy; He's right there next to me, teaching me to walk as He walked. And, as long as I'm aligned with Him and walking in the light of His truth, then it's easy, then my burden is light.⁸



John didn't hesitate to write that they must live as Jesus did because John knew something vital about Christian living:

Living like Jesus isn't so tough if we genuinely know Him.⁹ Let's look at 1 John 2:3 again. But, instead of focusing on the last part of the verse, let's look at the first part,

*We know that we have come to know him if we keep his commands.*¹⁰ You see, keeping His commands doesn't come first. Obedience is not a condition we must meet BEFORE we can know God. It's the other way around! Obedience is the fruit that results from knowing God.¹¹ This is why obedience is not burdensome. Therefore, if we want to live like Jesus, we don't begin by trying hard to keep His commands, we begin by coming to know Jesus personally. Put another way, we begin with the root, not the fruit. Obedience is important, but obedience isn't the way to earn our life in Christ. We must first find our life in Christ and grow to know Him more and more. Then, and only then, will we succeed at living like Jesus.¹² However, if we have not come to genuinely know Him, it's no wonder that His commands feel burdensome.

Later on, 1 John 5:3-4 tells us, *In fact, this is love for God: to keep his commands. And his commands are not burdensome, for everyone born of God overcomes the world... Therefore, if we feel burdened by keeping God's commands, something is wrong. Either we are approaching obedience the wrong way or we have not been born of God, so we don't really know Him.*¹³ John leaves no room for poser Christians. Do you know what a poser is?

Back when I was a student at the UNW in St. Paul, I used to ride my skateboard to class. My dorm room was on the top of the hill and the classrooms were down by Lake Johanna. I could easily save 5 minutes by jumping on my skateboard and just cruising down the hill. Actually, I still remember one day I was especially late for class and I was just flying down the hill, probably almost 20 mph. All of a sudden, I came around a corner with some pine trees and there was an older gentleman walking in a nice suit, carrying a brief case. I thought, oh no, I better not fly by this guy and startle him. So, I did my best to slow down and kind of jumped off my skateboard with a little pop up trick, casually landed

⁶ (D. A. Carson) *The Expositor's Bible Commentary, Rev. Ed., Vol. 9, Matthew & Mark*, Longman & Garland, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2010, p. 322.

⁷ Consider 1 John 2:1 which tells us that Jesus is our advocate.

⁸ Perhaps you've seen a scene where a little boy or girl is lifting something heavy, something far heavier than you would ever imagine them being able to lift. You marvel at this, *Wow, how in the world is this little one able to do that!?* The little kid is like, *Yeah, I'm super strong! Don't mess with me!* Then, you see in the background that their dad was the one who was actually doing the heavy lifting. The real source of this little one's strength is the One standing next to them.

⁹ Consider also John 14:12 and Acts 4:13.

¹⁰ *We know that we know.* The double use of *ginōskō* emphasizes the importance of knowing that one has a relationship with God. (Akin, D. L. (2001). *1, 2, 3 John* (Vol. 38, p. 90). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.)

¹¹ See Bultman quoted in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, vol. 12, p. 315.

¹² Once we are genuinely in Christ, that becomes the foundation from which we can live like Him. This intensely personal relationship with Jesus, that is both permanent and continuous, acts as the basis for, and provides the power, to live ethically. *ō* the indicative and the imperative of the Christian life are joined together as a cause and effect. *ō* the indicative of the Christ-event becomes the foundation for and the content of the imperative. (Akin, D. L. (2001). *1, 2, 3 John* (Vol. 38, p. 95). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers. (Quoting Smalley and Strecker)

¹³ When we talk about knowing Christ, I can't help but reflect on the Apostle Paul's words in Philippians 3. As for keeping God's commands and being righteous based on the law, Paul says that he was faultless. But then, then he goes on to say this in Philippians 3:8-11, *I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ- the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith. 10 I want to know Christ- yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, 11 and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead.* Paul wasn't just looking to intellectually understand a better truth and a better theology, although that was most certainly the case. But what Paul was looking to know was Christ, the living Christ. He was looking to know Him personally. Until we come to know Christ personally, our personal efforts to obey God will just be frustrating. If we want to live like Jesus, we must first know Him; that is what will lead us to keep his commands. 1 John 5:12 says that *whoever has the Son has life* - Pastor Dave Johnson from Church of the Open Door explains it this way, *eternal life is a who-not a commodity.*

on my feet, and starting walking next to him. It turned out to be the college president, Dr. Donald Ericksen! Boy was I glad that I didn't fly past him. He was actually really nice to me and asked how I was doing and what I was majoring in.

Sporting my skater haircut and my ripped-up jeans, I confidently told him I was a ministry major. I can only imagine he later shook his head and thought, "Oh my, what is this college coming to?"¹⁴ Living like Jesus was a genuine thing for me back then, but I'll let you in on a little secret: as far as skateboarding goes, I was actually a poser. Sure, I had a cool skateboard that said "God Rules." And, I had an amazing haircut. But I was a poser. I couldn't do many real skater tricks. In fact, I couldn't even ollie. That's where you jump with your skateboard onto a picnic table or something without your hand touching the skateboard.

John leaves no room for poser Christians. 1 Jn. 2:4 says, "Whoever says, 'I know him,' but does not do what he commands is a liar, and the truth is not in that person." If our Christian life is not generally characterized by obedience, then our lie is exposed, it becomes clear that the truth isn't actually in us. If it was, we would keep His commands. It would bother us to walk in darkness, and we'd run full speed back into the light the first chance we had. If constant disobedience predominates our everyday lives, then it would be prudent for us to reassess whether we truly know Christ.¹⁵ And if we don't know Christ, we should get to know Him today.

Many of us here this morning grew up in church. In fact, I suppose many of the readers of 1 John also grew up in church. By the time John wrote this letter, the Christian faith had been around some 60 years. The church was likely filled with 2nd and 3rd generation believers. How many Christians do you know who are the 1st Christian in their family, who came to Christ before their parents and grandparents? Probably not too many. Here's a vital truth for 2nd and 3rd generation Christians: God has no grandchildren. We don't get to God's house by riding in the back of our parents' mini-van (or for some of us the family station wagon). That's how we used to get to Thanksgiving dinner and Christmas at grandpa and grandma's. But none of us can ride on the shirt-tails of our parents' faith or our friends' faith. We need to know Christ personally.¹⁶ We need to make our own decision to trust Christ.¹⁷ Once we've come to genuinely know Christ for ourselves, then we'll find that living like Jesus isn't quite so tough.

After telling his readers to live as Jesus did, John then zeroes in on one singular command. In 1 John 2:7 he says, "Dear friends, I am not writing you a new command but an old one, which you have had since the beginning. This old command is the message you have heard." At first, this seems a little vague, which command does he mean? But as we look at the broader context, John seems to be referring to Jesus' command to love one another. 60 years earlier, Jesus said in John 13:34, "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another."¹⁸ John is basically saying, "Was there, my ears heard this command when it first came across Jesus' lips. It was a new command then, but it's an old command now. And yet, it's still just as relevant and vital for Christ followers today." This is our spiritual heritage, to love as Jesus loved.¹⁹ Therefore, John is teaching his readers that we are not only called to live obediently but

We are also called to live like Jesus, lovingly.²⁰ This is why verses 9-11 talk about this contrast between light/darkness demonstrated in our love/hate for one another. 1 John 2:9-10 says, "Anyone who claims to be in the light but hates a brother or sister is still in the darkness. Anyone who loves their brother and sister lives in the light and there is nothing in them to make them stumble." John keeps looping back to this idea of light. In fact, he uses the word "light" 6 times in his first 2 chapters. He illustrates our need for light, in that it keeps us from stumbling around in the dark.

¹⁴ Back in those skater days, I actually wore my favorite pair of red chucks and I had written on the side of them, 1 John 2:6. It was the 1984 version, "Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did."

¹⁵ See *NIV Zondervan Study Bible* footnote on pp. 2563-2564. Grand Rapids, MI, 2015.

¹⁶ Jeremiah 9:24 says, "But let the one who boasts boast about this: that they have the understanding to know me."

¹⁷ The church is not a country club. We don't get in by paying our membership dues or having the right connections to certain, powerful people.

¹⁸ Jesus repeats this command again in His famous Vine and the Branches teaching. **John 15:12** says, "My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you."

¹⁹ Not to mention this is rooted in the Old Testament as well. Note James 2:8 and Leviticus 19:18 for example.

²⁰ Read Ephesians 5:2.

1 John 2:11 goes on to say, %But anyone who hates a brother or sister is in the darkness and walks around in the darkness. They do not know where they are going, because the darkness has blinded them.+%Those who hate their [Bros/Sis] live in a state of darkness where there is not just an absence of love, but an absence of God.†²¹ Therefore, it's no wonder why they live, the way they live, and fail to love, the way we would expect a Christian to love. They are walking spiritually blind, separated from the God of light. They have no compass and no way to navigate. And so, the darkness causes them to stumble and fumble around. Like someone getting up to use the bathroom at night. They don't want to turn the light on because it hurts their eyes. So, they trip over the rug, step on the kid's toys, and kick the dog. All because the darkness has blinded them. You can really hurt yourself and hurt others when you don't have light.²²

1 John 2:8 has a really encouraging phrase, %the darkness is passing.+Some translations clarify %the darkness is passing away.†²³ What John is getting at, is the great progress being made in these believers' lives. As the truth of the message permeates their hearts, they are living it out and bearing its fruit.²⁴ In their personal lives, walking in darkness is becoming less and less.²⁵ They are getting in step with walking in the light and displaying the evidence of God's truth in the way they live and love.²⁶ This is why 1 John 2:8 says, %**Yet I am writing you a new command**; its truth is seen in him and in you, because the darkness is passing and the true light is already shining.+The newness of this command to love is seen in the present-day impact of John's readers, as they live out their love for their fellow Bros/Sis in Christ. John makes this hopeful and encouraging note: the true light is already shining!

Living like Jesus means shining the true light. Rather than the hypocrisy of hatred and stumbling in darkness, the world sees the true light, displayed in the genuine power and love of Christ.²⁷ Not perfectly, but close enough to catch a glimpse of something otherworldly.²⁸ In our daily growth as disciples, we learn to live like Jesus, and people see Jesus in our lives. We are the only option people have right now for seeing Jesus in the flesh. We are now His hands and feet because His physical body ascended into heaven. He left us here to be His ambassadors in the flesh. Some people call this %Jesus with skin on.+

This should excite us and invigorate us. What great purpose we have: wherever we go and whatever we do, to live like Jesus, to be the physical, daily presence of Jesus to our friends and neighbors! This is why we're on the planet!

How great would it be if people would say of Efree Bemidji, %you should meet some of the people from that church on the corner of Carr Lake Rd and Washington. Man, I tell you, those people really live like Jesus! It's insane! I don't know what's in the water over there, but I totally want some of that!†²⁹ **Brother or Sister in Christ, as we live like Jesus, obediently and lovingly, may His true light shine through us!**

*This sermon was preached at the Evangelical Free Church of Bemidji
on October 22, 2018 by Pastor Jerry R. A. Johnson*

²¹ Akin, D. L. (2001). *1, 2, 3 John* (Vol. 38, p. 100). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

²² Light is a really good thing. Because God is light, we can avoid an amazing amount of pain for ourselves and for others.

²³ See ESV and NKJV.

²⁴ Kruse, C. G. (2000). *The letters of John* (p. 83). Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: W.B. Eerdmans Pub.; Apollos.

²⁵ Consider Romans 13:10-14.

²⁶ Consider John 12:35-36.

²⁷ Read John 15:16-17.

²⁸ %the kingdom was inaugurated. The transformed lives of his followers provide infallible evidence for this victory.+(Akin, D. L. (2001). *1, 2, 3 John* (Vol. 38, p. 97). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.)

²⁹ John 13:35 says, %By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.+