

## **CAST THE NET ON THE RIGHT SIDE**

**John 21:1-14**

**By Andy Manning**

### **I. INTRODUCTION**

1. One way to summarize the Christian life: Obedience. It's all about reading your Bible and doing what it says.
2. **1 Corinthians 7:19** "Keeping God's commands is what matters."
3. Christianity is not just about believing, but obeying. It is not just a list of doctrines to believe, but a Person to obey. Even the demons believe, but they are not Christians because they do not obey the Lord Jesus Christ.
4. Christianity is not just about knowledge, but obedience. It's not just about biblical knowledge, but biblical obedience. The Bible was not given for information, but our transformation.
5. Christianity is not just about attendance, but allegiance to the person of Jesus Christ. It is not just about baptism and communion, but being obedient and compliant to God's will. It is not just about confessing your sins, but turning away from sin and submitting to God's will. Christians aren't just fans of Jesus, but followers of Jesus. We don't just cheer for Jesus, we obey Him. Jesus is not our buddy, He is our master. Jesus is not our co-pilot, He is the captain of our ship. He is not just our Savior, He is our king.
6. Obedience is the proof of faith.
  - i. The Bible says that we are saved by faith and not by works (Eph. 2:8-9). But it also says that faith without obedience is dead. **James 2:17** "In the same way faith, if it does not have works, is dead by itself."
  - ii. How do you know if you have true faith? True faith is obedient.
  - iii. The only parts of the Bible that you believe are the parts that you obey.
  - iv. Jesus made it clear that only the obedient will go to heaven. **Matthew 7:21** "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven."
  - v. **W.E. Vine** "When a man obeys God he gives the only possible evidence that in his heart he believes God."
  - vi. **Dietrich Bonhoeffer** "Only he who believes truly obeys, and only he who obeys truly believes."
7. Obedience is the definition of loving God.
  - i. **John 14:21** "The one who has my commands and keeps them is the one who loves me."
  - ii. Loving God is not just being thankful, but obedient. It is not just admiration for God, but obedience to God. It's not just affection for God, but submission to His will.
8. Obedience is required for an effective prayer life.
  - i. You might say you talk to God all the time, but do you obey Him? Prayer without obedience is like trying to swim without any arms and legs. Your prayers will sink to the floor.

- ii. **James 5:16** “The prayer of a righteous person is very powerful in its effect.”
- 9. Obedience is the goal of the church.
  - i. **Matthew 28:19-20** “19 Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.”
  - ii. The goal of the church ultimately is not to make more attenders, but to make more obedient followers of Jesus.
  - iii. The goal is not to provide a place for you to make friends, but to lead you to total obedience to Jesus.
  - iv. Obedience is the mark of a healthy church. It doesn’t matter how big the church is, but how obedient it is. It doesn’t matter where the church meets, but whether the church is obedient. It doesn’t matter how interesting the sermons are, or how entertaining the music is, or how nice the facilities are, or how many services we have; all that matters is how obedient we are.
  - v. You should be more obedient today than when you first started attending Church Acadiana. If not, then we have failed. That’s what the church is about.
- 10. Today we are going to look at story that will help us learn how to grow in obedience.

## II. TEXT

1. After this, Jesus revealed himself again to his disciples by the Sea of Tiberias. He revealed himself in this way:
  - i. The Sea of Tiberias was another name for the Sea of Galilee.
  - ii. After His resurrection, Jesus instructed the disciples to meet Him in Galilee, the northern region of Israel where Jesus was from, and performed much of His ministry (Mt 28:10).
2. 2 Simon Peter, Thomas (called “Twin”), Nathanael from Cana of Galilee, Zebedee’s sons, and two others of his disciples were together.
3. 3 “I’m going fishing,” Simon Peter said to them.
4. “We’re coming with you,” they told him. They went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing.
  - i. Nighttime was the best time for fishing.
5. 4 When daybreak came, Jesus stood on the shore, but the disciples did not know it was Jesus. 5 “Friends,” Jesus called to them, “you don’t have any fish, do you?”
6. “No,” they answered.
7. 6 “Cast the net on the right side of the boat,” he told them, “and you’ll find some.” So they did, and they were unable to haul it in because of the large number of fish. 7 The disciple, the one Jesus loved, said to Peter, “It is the Lord!”
8. When Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he tied his outer clothing around him (for he had taken it off) and plunged into the sea. 8 Since they were not far from land (about a hundred yards, away), the other disciples came in the boat, dragging the net full of fish. 9 When they got out on land, they saw a charcoal fire there, with fish lying on it, and bread. 10 “Bring some of the fish you’ve just caught,” Jesus told them. 11 So Simon Peter climbed up and hauled the net ashore, full of large fish— 153 of them. Even though there were so many, the net was not torn.

- i. 153 fish. Why is this number recorded for us?
  1. Some people make a big deal out of the numbers in the Bible. They think that there is a hidden meaning in the numbers.
  2. For example:
    - a. Cyril of Alexandria, fifth century:
      - i. 100 represents the fullness of the Gentiles who will be gathered to Christ.
      - ii. 50 stands for the remnant of Israel who will be gathered in.
      - iii. 3 stands for the Trinity to whose glory all things are done.
    - b. Augustine:
      - i. 10 is the number of the law, since there are ten commandments.
      - ii. 7 is the number of grace, for the gifts of the Spirit are sevenfold.
      - iii.  $7 + 10 = 17$ .
      - iv. 153 is the sum of all the numbers, 1-17.
      - v. 153 stands for all those who by law or by grace are moved to come to Jesus Christ.
    - c. Jerome, fourth century:
      - i. Claimed there are 153 types of fish in the sea.
      - ii. The catch includes every kind of fish.
      - iii. The number symbolizes that some day people of all nations will be gathered to Christ.
  3. The problem this mindset is that there are as many theories as there are people, and they are just that – theories. There is no way to verify them. So there is no reason to assume and even wonder if there is a deeper meaning to the number.
  4. John MacArthur notes that the number was probably recorded by John simply to provide more evidence that he was an eyewitness to these events, and that they really happened.
- ii. “Even though there were so many, the net was not torn.”
  1. This is a reminder of Christ’s promise to hold us securely until the end.
  2. **John 6:39** “This is the will of him who sent me: that I should lose none of those he has given me but should raise them up on the last day.”
  3. Theologians refer to this as the doctrine of eternal security, or the perseverance of the saints. Once saved, always saved. You cannot lose your salvation. Why? Because it is not dependent upon your faithfulness, but God’s. Jesus promises to hold us firmly and never let us go.
  4. **John 10:28-29** “28 I give them eternal life, and they will never perish. No one will snatch them out of my hand. 29 My Father, who has given

them to me, is greater than all. No one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand."

9. 12 "Come and have breakfast," Jesus told them. None of the disciples dared ask him, "Who are you?" because they knew it was the Lord. 13 Jesus came, took the bread, and gave it to them. He did the same with the fish.
  - i. Why did Jesus feed the disciples? This was a reminder to them that even though He had risen from the grave and would soon return to the Father, He would continue to meet their needs.
  - ii. **Philippians 4:19** "And my God will supply all your needs according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus."
  - iii. **Matthew 6:33** "But seek first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness, and all these things will be provided for you."
10. 14 This was now the third time Jesus appeared, to the disciples after he was raised from the dead.
  - i. Why is this story included by John? To provide more evidence that the disciples had not seen a vision, or a hallucination, or just Christ's ghost. They had seen and interacted with the bodily risen Christ. A mere spirit would not likely give fishing advice, or build a campfire, or cook and serve breakfast for the disciples.
  - ii. This story also provides a good analogy of the importance of obedience.
  - iii. Apart from Christ, they caught nothing. With Christ, they caught a lot. Apart from Christ they spent all night fishing and came up empty. But with Christ, it took just one cast of the net to catch a full load of fish.
  - iv. **Big Idea: Life works best when we follow God's instructions.**
  - v. Obedience does not guarantee a thriving business or a big bank account, but it does promise the best life. As my wife has taught our kids, "The best life is the obedient life."
  - vi. Jesus doesn't need your obedience. You need your obedience.
  - vii. Let's look more closely at this story, and we'll see three requirements for obedience.

### III. THREE REQUIREMENTS OF OBEDIENCE

#### 1. Obedience requires humility.

- i. Before Jesus told the disciples to cast their net on the other side of the boat, He asked them a question. "You don't have any fish, do you?" They answered, "No."
- ii. Jesus already knew the answer to this question. So why did He ask it? Because He wanted them to admit it. He knew that they would only be willing to obey His way if they first admitted that their way wasn't working.
- iii. To be willing to obey, you first have to admit that what you were doing before Christ wasn't working. You have to humble yourself. You have to admit, to recognize that life without Christ doesn't work. That you haven't done a good job at leading your own life. That a life of rebellion against God, a life of ignoring God, a life of running from God has gotten you nowhere; it has only led to suffering, and sorrow, and shame. You have to admit that

you've made a mess of things. That you have wrecked your relationships; you hurt your loved ones; you have ruined your reputation; you have damaged your career; you have destroyed your health; you have wasted opportunities; you have squandered your finances; you have thrown away your talents. And now, you are ready for Jesus to take the wheel. You are ready for Jesus to be in charge. You are ready to say, "I'll do whatever you want me to, however you want me to do it."

- iv. I remember reading the story of Stephen Arterburn, the author of *Every Man's Battle*. It's a book about every man's battle with lust and pornography. He was living in southern California, and he had reached a level of professional success so that he could afford to buy a beautiful sports car convertible. One afternoon he was driving with the top down, and he noticed an attractive woman jogging on the sidewalk. His eyes locked on her. He stared her up and down. As he passed her, his head turned completely around so he could get the full picture. And then "Crash!" His car slammed into the car in front of him. That's when he got serious about obeying God's commands about sexual integrity. He was already a Christian. He already knew that lust was sinful. But for him to be obedient, he first had to be humbled. He had to come to admit that his lust was a problem. That ignoring God's will was not working; it was destructive; it had consequences.
- v. Obedience requires the humility to admit that life without God isn't working. Me in the driver's seat is not working. Ignoring God's commands is not working. And sometimes the only way to get to that point is for something bad to happen. And if you don't humble yourself, then God will humble you. If you don't humble yourself, then God will cause you to have your own convertible moment. If you can't see that life without God isn't working, then God will step in and make it painfully obvious. This is what the Bible means when it says, "God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble (James 4:6)."
- vi. There's another kind of humility that is required for obedience. It is not the humility to admit that your disobedience is destroying your life, but to humility to admit that God is not impressed with your obedience. It is the humility to admit that no amount of obedience can earn you a place in heaven. No amount of obedience can make you good enough for heaven. No matter how hard you strive to obey God, you are still a sinner who deserves the wrath of God in eternal hell. And the only way you can be forgiven and go to heaven is through the sacrifice of Christ on the cross for your sins.
- vii. God is pleased with our obedience. It honors Him. It glorifies Him. It serves Him. But only if we obey with a humble attitude. If we obey for the wrong reasons – to impress others, to earn our way to heaven, to put God in our debt so that He owes us – then our "obedience" is nothing more than evil masquerading righteousness.

- viii. The Bible says that we are not saved by our good deeds. We are saved by Christ's good deed for us. We are not saved by our obedience. We are saved by Christ's obedience. If God were to treat us as we deserve, it would be hell. But we put our faith in Christ so that God will treat us as Christ deserves. We don't obey to work our way to heaven. We obey because Heaven has working in our lives, loving us, forgiving us, and empowering us.

## **2. Obedience requires trust.**

- i. What was Christ's command to the disciples as they were fishing? To cast their net on the other side of the boat. The problem with this command was that it didn't make sense. They were professional fisherman. They knew the best time to fish, the best spots for fishing, the best equipment to use, etc. They had all the skills, they knew all the tricks, and casting the net on the other side of the boat was not one of them. For the disciples to be obedient, they had to trust in Christ even though His command didn't make sense.
- ii. Obedience requires trust, because we're not going to always understand God's commands. They aren't always going to make sense. So we have to trust.
- iii. What do we need to trust to be obedient?

### **1. We must trust that God knows better than us.**

- a. Just because I can't see it doesn't mean that God can't see it. Just because I don't understand it doesn't mean that God doesn't understand it. Just because it doesn't make sense to me doesn't mean that it doesn't make sense.
- b. Just like a father is much smarter than his five-year-old, God is much smarter than us. He knows more than us. He sees further than us. He knows the past, the present, the future. He has all knowledge. He knows everything about everything. Even if we can't understand, we should trust that He knows best.
- c. There are many commands in the Bible that don't make sense on the surface, but research has shown us that God's way is best. For example, the Bible prohibits divorce. We might ask, "Why?" "What's the big deal?" "Does God really want us to stay chained up in the prison of a miserable marriage?" Researchers have studied the effects of divorce and had found that "those who divorce suffer higher rates of alcoholism, illness, depression, mental illness, and suicide... A Yale researcher found that the effect of divorce on your health is the equivalent of smoking a pack of cigarettes a day (Nancy Pearcey, *Love Thy Body*, 243)." It turns out God knows what He is talking about.

### **2. We must trust that God loves us.**

- a. God's commands are not just for His glory, but for our good. His commands are always for our benefit.

- b. When God says “Don’t” He means “Don’t hurt yourself!” When God says “Do this” He means “Do this for your own good.”
- c. God is the most loving Father. When a loving father sets rules for his kids, they are for their good; their protection; their happiness.
- d. For example, Jesus commands us to stay away from lust. This would include looking at pornography. Some people might wonder, “What’s the big deal with looking at pictures? Does it do any harm?” Researchers have been studying the effects of porn for several decades now, and this is what they’ve found (Nancy Pearcey, *Love Thy Body*, 125-126):
  - i. Married men who watch porn are twice as likely to divorce.
  - ii. Porn shrinks the brain and reduces neural activity. It makes you dumber.
  - iii. Porn is addictive, leads to violence, destroys relationships, and feeds sex trafficking and prostitution.
  - iv. Those who watch porn are more likely to say they would commit rape or sexual assault (if they knew they wouldn’t be caught).
- e. No wonder God tells us to avoid lust. It’s bad for us.

**3. We must trust that God is worthy.**

- a. We must believe that God deserves our obedience.
- b. We must believe that there is a God, and we are not Him.
- c. God created us from nothing, and saved us from hell through the suffering of the cross. Every breath and every heartbeat is an undeserved gift from Him. He brought us into this world, and He can take us out in an instant. He deserves our obedience.
- d. God is perfectly good. He has never sinned against us. He is never selfish. He is always attentive to us. He watches over us. He is compassionate, merciful, forgiving. He deserves our obedience.
- e. Jesus doesn’t need your obedience. He deserves it.
- iv. Obedience requires trust because sometimes God’s commands are hard to understand.
- v. But obedience does not require understanding. God does not owe us an explanation. He does not promise an explanation. We know that Jesus rose from the grave. We know that God is good from how He has treated us in the past. And therefore we can trust and obey when we don’t understand.

**3. Obedience requires commitment.**

- i. Jesus told the disciples to cast the net on the right side of the boat. Sounds like a simple enough command, until you realize that the disciples had been fishing all night. They were tired, discouraged, ready to get some sleep. Following this command was not going to be easy. It was very inconvenient. To obey Christ's command, they had to be committed. They had to be willing to do what Christ said even though it was hard.
- ii. Sometimes Christ's commands make life harder. Sometimes His commands make life more difficult. Sometimes obedience leads to pain and suffering and persecution. Sometimes obedience means the loss of money, the loss of a business, the loss of a relationship, the loss of your reputation, the loss of time and energy. Obedience often makes life harder.
- iii. This is why obedience requires commitment. Commitment is the decision to do something no matter how hard it gets. I'm going to obey Christ, even when it is hard. Obey God and leave all the consequences to Him.
- iv. You might ask, "Didn't you say that God's commands are for our good? Then how can they also make life harder?" There are three answers to this question.
  - 1. The obedient life is the best life, but the rewards are often experienced down the road.
    - a. When you obey God, you are denying instant gratification, instant pleasure, instant comfort, instant profits, etc. So in the short term, obedience is harder than sin; it can be painful; it can be inconvenient; but in the long run it pays off.
    - b. It's like handling your money wisely. In the short run, being frugal and thrifty is not fun. It might mean denying yourself that new, shiny toy. It might mean not having the newest, nicest things. It might mean not going on an expensive trip. It might mean eating out as much, or giving up cable TV, etc. But in the long run, it means financial security and peace and freedom. It means less stress. It means better sleep. It means that when a financial crisis comes along, it's merely an inconvenience because you are prepared. When the opportunity to give to the Lord's work comes along, you have money saved up for it. It means a better, earlier retirement. It means a bigger nest egg to pass on to your children. It means a clear conscience because you have been handling your finances in a godly way, rather than a sinful and selfish way.
    - c. So yes, obedience can make your life harder in the short term, but always better in the long term.
  - 2. Sometimes the rewards of obedience will not be felt until the next life.
    - a. While on earth, obedience may lead to a life of poverty and pain. It may lead to persecution. It may lead to very difficult



circumstances. But in the end, it will lead to glory – the great rewards in heaven.

- b. Consider Jesus. Obedience for Him meant going to the cross. It meant a Roman flogging and execution. The benefits of obedience were not felt by Jesus in this life. But the benefits were felt in the next life. His obedience opened the way for the salvation of mankind.
  - c. Or consider Paul. Obedience for Paul meant planting churches in hostile territories. Paul's obedience led to a life of suffering, torture, hardship, and ultimately his own execution. The rewards of obedience were not fully enjoyed in this life. But Paul is enjoying those rewards today. He is being rewarded in heaven for his great faithfulness to the cause of Christ.
3. Even though obedience can make life harder, it always results in a closer walk with Jesus. And that is invaluable.
- a. When you are obedient, you will have a clear conscience; you won't struggle with guilt and shame. You will never regret obedience.
  - b. When you are obedient, Christ will draw near to you and give you His peace – peace which surpasses all understanding.
    - i. **William Barclay** "To do the will of God is the only way to peace. There can be no peace when we are at variance with the King of the universe."
  - c. When are obedient, Christ will give you His power and answer your prayers.
    - i. **William Barclay** "To do the will of God is the only way to power. When we go our own way, we have nothing to call on but our own power, and therefore collapse is inevitable. When we go God's way, we go in his power, and therefore victory is secure."
  - d. When you obey Christ in a costly way, you will experience a deeper level of intimacy than before.
  - e. Obedience may make life harder, but it will also make life better because you will be close to God.
  - f. It's like marriage and family. Having a wife and children requires sacrifice. It is often harder than being single. You have to be selfless. You have to share. You have to put others before yourself. You have to spend your money on others. You get less alone time. Less time for yourself. You often have to serve others rather than just take care of yourself. You will hurt them, and they will hurt you. They will expose your weaknesses. But despite all of the hardships of having a wife and children, the rewards make it worth it. The richness of those relationships make it all worth it. Sharing your love

and your life with a spouse and children are worth far more than any hardships that go along with it.

- g. The same is true with Jesus. Obedience can be costly and painful, but it is always worth it, because it means a close walk with Jesus. Nothing can compare or compete with that.
- v. Obedience is always worth it, but it is often not easy. It often makes life harder. So it requires commitment. We must decide in advance that we are going to obey Christ no matter the cost. No matter how painful it is. No matter the discomfort. No matter the inconvenience. We will be obedient.
- vi. Without this commitment you will only obey God's will when it is easy. When it results in instant pleasure and comfort and security. But if you only obey God when you feel like it, then He is not God, you are. He is not in charge, you are. His commands are merely suggestions. That's not Christianity. That's not what it means to be a follower of Jesus.

#### **IV. CONCLUSION**

1. When I was in middle school I heard a little song that made a big impact on my life. I already knew all about the Bible. I believed in Jesus. I was in church every Sunday. But I was not serious about God. I was not committed to obeying God in every area of my life. And God used a little song to wake me up. The words go like this: "I don't wanna be, I don't wanna be a casual Christian. I don't wanna live, I don't wanna live a lukewarm life. Because I wanna light up the night, with an everlasting light, I don't wanna live the casual Christian life." That song made me realize that there are two types of Christians. There are casual Christians, and committed Christians; lukewarm Christians, and on-fire Christians; disobedient Christians, and obedient Christians. God showed me that I was a casual Christian. A lukewarm Christian. I was tolerating sin in many areas of my life. I was not fully and totally dedicated and committed. I was a half-hearted Christian. And so by God's grace I rededicated my life to Jesus Christ. I decided that from then on I wasn't going to be a casual Christian, a lukewarm Christian, a disobedient Christian. Instead, I was going to go all out for Jesus and make my life all about Him. From then on I was going to pay close attention to His word and His commands, and I was going to do my best to obey Christ in every way, every single day.
2. I wonder, do you need to come to that place in your life? Do you need to rededicate your life to Jesus?
  - i. Are you living in disobedience? Today is the day to repent of pornography, adultery, premarital sex, living together before marriage, considering divorce, stealing, lying, cheating, drunkenness, illegal drug use, filthy language, refusing to get baptized, not tithing, being uncommitted to church, committing physical abuse against others, gossip, homosexuality, dishonoring your parents, mistreating your spouse or kids, bitterness or unforgiveness.
3. If you are living in sin, would you make a commitment to repent today and turn to Christ in wholehearted obedience.

4. The devil is whispering in your ear, “Don’t do it. It’s no big deal. You’re not hurting anybody. Nobody will find out. You can’t be happy without it. You can’t make it without it.”
5. But remember: Life works best when we follow God’s instructions.