

# Is Love for Jesus, or Faith in Jesus, the Root of Ministry and Obedience■

by John Piper

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*This sermon emphasizes the importance of believing in Jesus as a spiritual act of the soul, focusing on receiving Him as living water and bread from heaven for soul satisfaction. It delves into the deep connection between loving Jesus and trusting Him, highlighting that true faith involves continuous communion with God and a heart that drinks, eats, and abides in Christ. The message challenges the notion of faith as merely a mental decision and calls for a transformative, affectional dimension in our relationship with Jesus.*

**Scripture:** John 6:35, John 15:5, John 1:11, John 14:15, Romans 3:28

**Topics:** "Faith as Communion", "Spiritual Nourishment in Christ"

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## Description

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## Transcript

I'll just pray one more time. Unless the Lord builds a house, the builder builds in vain. Unless the Lord watches over the city, the watchman stays awake in vain.

Unless the Lord preaches the sermon, all the preparation done is in vain. So we all together now want to hear from you. Please do the word, I pray in Jesus' name, amen.

So in the first service, I started with a personal testimony and I just want to tell you that, because how significant it was and is. I was ordained to the gospel ministry in 1975 at Lake Avenue Church in Pasadena, California in July and the signature of the chairman of the ordination council at the top of my ordination certificate and the pastor of that church is Raymond C. Ortland Sr. So get the picture now for the providence to hit you the way it hits me. Ray Ortland Sr. shepherded me as a young man toward ordination and his son, Raymond Ortland Jr., the founding pastor of this church, shepherded my son toward the gospel ministry.

That's an unusual and sweet and precious providence and I thank Jannie and Ray for their part in that and I just want to say it again, that two generations of Pipers owe more than we can say to two generations of Ortlands. I would not be here, I don't think, without Ray's dad, because though I was already in seminary, I didn't believe much in the local church. People in my days, that was 1968, nine, they were going barefoot, walking around the streets, wearing black armbands, marching and didn't go to church on Sunday and call themselves Christians, and I would have been there, I think, if I hadn't gone to church at Lake Avenue and looked around and listened and thought, this is real, the company of the committed.

Remember that? Oh my, there's so much to be thankful for. That's not the only reason why I'm knit together with Ray and this church and what makes this church tick. There's another reason.

From 1989 to 1998, Ray Ortland, this one right here, was teaching at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School and he taught a course on Psalms. I'll tell you afterwards how I know all this, but I tracked it down. And in the syllabus of the course on Psalms, he wrote this, communion with God is the central experience of human existence, out of which flows all that is profound and ennobling and strategic, delivering us from the stylistic banalities of the modern world, including those of evangelicalism.

What a great sentence. I read that and said, no wonder I like this place. No wonder I like Ray Ortland.

This is so right. Communion with God, the essence of existence, delivering us from the banalities, the political banalities, the entertainment banalities, the banalities of the world, and freeing us for something profound and noble and strategic. Wow.

So that's my message. Only you need to hear it from God, not from Ray Ortland or me. So here's the connection between that sentence in this morning's message, earlier, and this one.

John 21, 15 to 19 was this morning's text in the first service. And the point there was that Jesus says to Peter three times, do you love me? Do you love me? Do you love me? And he says, yes, yes, yes. And Jesus says, feed my sheep, feed my sheep, feed my sheep.

If you love me, you will feed my sheep. If you commune with God, if that's the essence of your existence, to use Ray's sentence, out of your life is going to flow rivers of living water and strategies and nobilities and greatness and food for sheep that causes them to grow up and be a certain way and not another way. So obedience is the fruit of loving Jesus.

Communion with God is the central experience of existence, for from it come all these profound and nobling strategic things. Now, here's the question for this message. Why did Jesus not say to Peter, do you trust me, feed my sheep? Do you trust me, feed my sheep? Do you trust me, feed my sheep? Why did he say, do you love me? Do you love me? Do you love me? Instead of saying, do you trust me? Do you trust me? Do you trust me? Chapter 14, verse 15.

If you love me, you will keep my commandments. Chapter 14, verse 23. If anyone loves me, he will keep my word.

It's not because it's wrong to say, if you trust me, you'll keep my word. He who trusts me will keep my word. That's not wrong.

Paul said the obedience of faith is the essence of the Christian life. He didn't say the obedience of love is the essence of the Christian life. He sums up the Christian life as the work of faith, not the work of love.

It's not wrong to say faith is where obedience comes from. Do you trust me, Peter? Feed my sheep. Do you trust me, Barnabas? Feed my sheep.

That's not a wrong sentence. And my question is, why didn't Jesus say that instead of saying, do you love me? And here's my answer, and then I'll try to show it from the Gospel of John. Jesus didn't say, do you love me, instead of saying, do you trust me? Because in Jesus' mind and the Gospel of John, loving Jesus that way is at the essence of trusting Jesus.

That's the point of this message. Now, I was talking with Ray before we came out here, telling him what I was gonna say. I said, you know, I just wrote a book on this, and the book is out there being assessed by some competent readers, because this is dangerous talk, theologically.

I'll tell you why, so that I can warn you against misunderstanding me and falling into error. You start talking about love being at the heart or the essence of faith, you are cozying up to wrecking the Protestant Reformation, where faith alone justifies. You start mingling other things with faith, you're about to lose the precious doctrine of justification by faith alone, apart from works of the law, Romans 3.28. That's dangerous, and I'm not a Roman Catholic.

I hate messing with the doctrine of justification by mingling faith with works, so that we depend ultimately on our own transformation, instead of the imputation of the righteousness of Christ on the basis of faith alone. And what I'm about to say sounds like that error. You with me? I don't want you to go there.

I don't want you to say, Oh, Piper said that obedience to the law or obedience to the commandments is at the heart of saving faith. That's heresy. Now, why isn't what I just said that? Why not? Because I'm not defining love as obedience.

So many people take the text, If you love me. If you love me, you will keep my commandments and say, See, love is obedience. It's not is.

Is is the wrong word. Results in is what the text says. Isn't it? If you love me, cause, you will keep my commandments.

Effect. Causes and effects aren't the same. Don't say that.

Don't go to that text and say, Love is obedience. Love means obedience. It doesn't.

At least in Jesus's mind and in the gospel of John, Loving Jesus is deeper and first. And from it, like a fountain flows, Obedience to his commands. So, what is the love that you're talking about, Which isn't yet obedience? Now, to answer that question, I'm going to point out an amazing thing about the gospel of John.

And if you have the answer to this question, Come see me, although I think they're going to whisk me away afterwards, So you won't breathe on me. Or I on you. Here's the amazing thing that is a question.

In the gospel of John, which you know is the gospel of belief, These things are written that you might believe that Jesus is the Son of God, And believing have life in his name. That's the point of the gospel. Belief, belief, belief.

The word belief doesn't even occur in the gospel. The word faith doesn't occur in the gospel. The word believe occurs 98 times.

The verb occurs 98 times, and the noun never. That cannot be an accident. You said Jerry Hawthorne pointed that out to you.

I'd love to know what Jerry Hawthorne thought was the explanation, Because I'm going to give you an explanation. I mean, it's my effort to understand what's going on here That such a crazy thing would happen as to write a whole gospel About the importance of believing, and never use the word belief, And never use the word faith. Ever.

Not once in the gospel. And only once in the epistles. Faith is a victory that overcomes the world.

But my question is, what is going on? Now often you read this explanation. And I'm going to reject it. I'll tell you why.

Oh, it's because John wants us to understand That faith is active, not passive. Now that sounds right, and in a sense I think it is right, But as I listen, I think what a lot of people mean when they say that is Faith causes actions. They say faith is active.

Faith is active because it produces action for Jesus, Obedience to Jesus, a life for Jesus. I don't think that's right. I don't think that's why John uses the verb all the time, And never uses the noun.

Here's what I mean when I say faith in John's gospel is acting. I mean that in here, before there's any movement of muscles in obedience at all, No embraces, no walking in paths of righteousness, No right use of your sexuality, That before any of that happens, There is this inner reality called believing, And it is an acting of the soul. The soul acts, and what would that be? The soul believes, and in believing is acting.

So here's the way I'm going to answer that question. What is the soul doing? Because John seems to want to draw attention to the doing of faith. Before there's any doing with the body, Let's go to John 1.11 For a very familiar definition of faith in John.

Nothing quite like it. There's one or two other texts in the New Testament that come close. This is the clearest.

What in this text is John saying believing is? Jesus came to his own, John 1.11 Jesus came to his own, and his own people did not receive him, But to as many as did receive him, Who believed in his name. Now pause and get the grammatical structure. To all who did receive him, comma, And you grammatical gurus or nerds know what a positive is, Something in apposition.

So believing is the same as receiving here. To all who did believe him, comma, Who believed in his name, comma, He gave the right to become the children of God, Who were born not of the blood, nor of the will of the flesh, Nor of the will of man, but of God. So John chooses to use words here, To make plain that receiving Jesus, Is what believing does.

That's what believing is. It is a receiving of Jesus, Which is an act of the soul, not the body. Now I've got no problem with Billy Graham asking people to come to the front.

My dad did that, I've done it. Walking to the front to receive Jesus. It's just totally irrelevant.

To faith, right? This is not faith. Faith is this miracle in here, That receives Jesus. And you can be totally paralyzed in a hospital bed, And do it.

You can be totally acting faith, Without moving a muscle of your body. In fact, you must act faith, As distinct from a muscle in your body, Or you will turn faith into works. Another clarification, When John 1-11 says, That believing is receiving him, Usually that verse is treated as an evangelistic verse, For those who receive him for the first time.

Totally right, good, true, just not the whole story. We receive Christ daily. All day long I say, You are welcomed here.

I receive you here. I invite you. You're knocking on the door, You're texting Revelation 3-20, That's spoken to churches.

Not unbelievers just. I open my door to you every morning. I'll move the furniture anywhere you want it, So that you'll sit here with me.

My door is open to you. My arms are extended to you. I receive you.

That's faith. Every day, all day long, Receiving Jesus. I need thee every hour, His face, voice.

Now the question becomes then, Okay, receive as what? Receive as what? There's two answers, And then I'll give you the verse, Where they come from. Receiving Jesus as the soul's, Jesus is the soul's drinking, Of living water that Jesus is, With soul satisfaction. So if you say, What does the heart do, Do in these 98 verbs, Called believing, The answer is it drinks, And swallows, And says ah, To Jesus and his word.

Here's the second thing you could say, About what it does. What faith does. It is the soul's eating, Of the bread of heaven, That Jesus is, With satisfaction.

So I'm drinking and I'm eating. So here's the verse, It's John 6.35, I am the bread of life, This is Jesus talking, I am the bread of life, And then he's going to mention, Eating and drinking, He could have said, I am the living water, But he shortens it down, I am the bread of life, Whoever comes to me, Will never hunger, And whoever believes in me, Will never thirst, Now notice the parallel, You see it, Coming and believing, Parallel, I think interchangeable here, Only the coming, The coming isn't the coming with your feet, It's coming with your hunger, And your thirst, Which is what a heart does, The heart is thirsty, My heart is hungry, And believing is, Turning to Jesus with your heart, And eating his bread, His water, I am the bread of life, He who comes to me, Shall never hunger, He who believes in me, Shall never thirst, So believing is a coming, To eat the bread, And drink the water, So as to be satisfied, And never thirst, That's believing in John, No spatial movement, No physical movement, No geographic movement, Just a coming of the soul, The heart, The soul, The will, The affections, These are capacities of our inner being, And we drink, And we eat, And we taste, And we savor, And we're satisfied before we move a muscle, The heart's coming to the water, Is the movement of thirst, It's not the movement of the body, The heart's coming to bread, Is the movement of hunger, It's not the movement of any muscles, Those soul movements, Desiring, Longing, Drinking, Feeding, Embracing, Treasuring, Tasting, Christ, Is what John says faith is doing, And that's why it's a verb, All the time, In John, At least that's, Gotta be careful here, Because you all, If you've walked with Jesus a long time, You've probably spent a lot of time in John, Because John is the first book people are given, And John is the deepest book in the Bible, Probably. Oh, how deceptive is the simple grammar, Of all these and, and, and, and's, Lo-Heb-ric, and's, Like don't you know, There's some other conjunctions? It is the simplest book, And probably has more layers of meaning, Than any other book, So I want to be careful, My explanation I'm giving you right now, Why the verb is always used,

Is a part of the explanation, I am sure not the whole, Okay? Are we clear on that? No, no presumption here, That I've got John figured out, Because I just think, The apostle whom he loved, Was granted sights, More than the others, I mean, It's just, The book is unfathomable, In a literal sense, Notice the word not, And never in 635, Whoever comes to me, Shall not hunger, And whoever believes in me, Shall never thirst, Which means, This is eternal life, We're talking about here, If you never hunger again, Because you've drunk Jesus, And are satisfied in Jesus, If you never hunger again, You're not in hell, Believe me, You're going to be hungry in hell, And you're going to be thirsty, And this says, You'll never be thirsty, So this is eternal life, We're talking about here, Verse 58 of chapter 6, Whoever feeds on this bread, Will live forever, Will live forever, So, What is believing, In the gospel of John? It's a receiving of Jesus, And what do we receive him as? We receive him as living water, We receive him as bread from heaven, And this Jesus water, And this Jesus bread, Are the two staples of life, If you wonder, Why did Jesus pick bread and water? Like, okay, That's what you need to live, Food and water, You don't have water, You die, You don't have food, You die, Can't live on water, Can't live on bread, You've got to have both, These are the two summary, This is life, Same thing with eternal life, You've got to have Jesus, Satisfying the thirsts and hungers, Of your heart, Or you won't live forever, So that's the meaning of believing, So when I ask, Why did John never use the noun, Belief or the noun faith, In his gospel, But the verb 98 times, My partial answer, Is that John loves to foreground, Believing, As a spiritual act of the soul, Receiving, Calming, Drinking, Eating, Loving, Christ, The soul has tasted, Christ is good, Taste and see, That the Lord is good, When the soul tastes, That the Lord is good, That taste is, What John means by, Believing, We never put down the cup, And we never lay aside the loaf, It's not like, Oh I start the Christian life, With a nice cup, Oh what a satisfying Savior, And then I don't drink anymore, You're not saved, If you're not drinking, Which is why I think, Jesus didn't stay, With these images, Do you remember the other image, That implies the continuity of it, More clearly in chapter 15, The vine and the branch, I am the vine, This is John 15 five, I am the vine, You are the branches, Whoever abides, In me, And I in him, He it is that bears much fruit, In the pastoral ministry, Well what is, What is a, What is a branch doing, When it's abiding, In the vine, It's drinking right, I mean I'm no biologist, But sap, Would that be what it's called, Sap, It's flowing, You snap it off, You're dead, So when you hear, Receive Jesus, Or drink Jesus, Or eat Jesus, Don't just think, A cup on the table, That you pour into, Here's Jesus, You pour it in, And you drink it, You put it down, And you go off to work, Like no, That's a bad image, I need Jesus driving, I need Jesus, Making decisions at work, I need Jesus, Everywhere, All the time, I need to be drinking, Jesus, Trusting Jesus, Feeding on Jesus, At every point, That's believing, In the gospel of John, Circle back now to Peter, At the sea of Galilee, And we'll finish, Do you love me, Peter, Do you love me, Do you love me, Means, Now, Do you receive me, As you're all satisfying bread, Do you drink from me, As you're living water, Which is believing, So, It was a bad question, Piper, The way you asked the question, Messed with us, You said, Why did he say, If you love me, You'll feed my sheep, Instead of saying, If you trust me, And he didn't do it, Instead of, Because that's not the way he thinks, You know, Questions can really wreck good answers, Don't you? Bad questions can wreck good answers, That's a bad question, Because it misunderstands, That in God's gospel, In the mind of Jesus, Believing is a receiving of Christ, As the all satisfying bread of heaven, The all satisfying water of life, The all satisfying light of the world, The all satisfying sap, Running through the vine, It's receiving and saying, Ah, and thank you, And I love you, And this is all I've ever hoped for, Yes, And then he turns around and says, That's love, And that's faith, Or, Not to equate the two, But to say they overlap, That where faith and love overlap, That's where he's talking, You don't have saving faith, If you don't love Jesus like this, And if you love Jesus like this, You have saving faith, That's how much they overlap, This is the first and great business of life, To believe like this, So back to Ray Ortlund's, Ray Ortlund Jr.'s, Psalm syllabus quote, Communion with God, Feeding on God in Christ, By paraphrase, Is

the central experience of human existence, Yes it is, Out of which flows, To use Ray's words, All that is profound, And nobling, And strategic, Indeed, I think you would agree Ray, All ministry, All feeding, Leading by feeding, Flows from communion with God, And communion with God, Is communion with God in Christ, And communion with God in Christ, Is a receiving, And a feeding, And a drinking, And an abiding, Which means that in John's mind, There's a way of loving Jesus, That is at the heart of believing in Jesus, Let's pray, Father this ups the ante, Because many teachers, For the last 200 years, Especially in America, Have taught, That believing is simply a mental decision, With no affectional dimension at all, And has resulted in a kind of Christianity, That is so sterile, I want for this church, I want for my son and his ministry, I want for myself and my own soul, To live out what Jesus, And what the gospel of John, So manifestly teaches, That believing is receiving, And receiving is eating, And drinking, To the soul's satisfaction, So help us do this miracle in us, I pray in Jesus name, Amen.

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