

## Is Loving Jesus all that Matters? Mt. 17:1-5

I have heard people say, “*it doesn't matter what you believe as long as you love Jesus.*” But does Scripture teach this? Are there any other things that identify a true disciple of the Lord Jesus?

God desires all people to be saved, but He also desires that they come to “*the knowledge of the truth*” (**1 Tim. 2:4**). Why is this important you might ask? Because God holds the truth to be vital to our salvation. Jesus in **Jn. 8:31-32** says, “*So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed him, “If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”* According to Jesus a true disciple listens to the Lord Jesus Christ and doesn't try to edit or rewrite His words. He doesn't try to remake Jesus into the image of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century culture. Peter puts it this way in **1 Peter 1:24-25**, “*The grass withers, and the flower falls off, but the word of the Lord endures forever.*”

Jesus *distinguished his disciples* not only by their love (**Jn. 13:34-35**) but also by their willingness to remain in His Word. In **John 8:31-32** Jesus said, “*If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.*” Abiding in His word, means continuing in His word, and evidentially it means truth matters to God. We can't claim to be disciples of Jesus if we don't remain in His teaching. The Lord distinguishes His true followers from people claiming to be his followers, by seeing if they have remained in His word. Authentic disciples of Jesus don't just say Amen to the words; they do them. Jesus once asked, “*Why do you call me, Lord, Lord, and do not do what I say?*” (**Luke 6:46**).

If we claim that Jesus is our Lord – this means He must rule over our lives. In was in **John 14:15** that Jesus said, “*If you love Me, you will keep my commandments.*” Loving the Lord means obeying His teaching; we need to do what He says the way that He says to do it. And we need to remember, the Bible warns us not to change the gospel. Remember Paul's words in **Gal. 1:6-9**? “*I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel— not that there is another one, but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again: If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed.*” This is strong and frightening language. If anyone changes the Word of God in His gospel that Paul and the other apostles preached, they will be cut off from God in Christ – that is what to be cursed here means (see Paul's use of this word in **Romans 9:3**).

Not only must we be careful of what we preach and or accept as God's truth, but we must also be careful what teachers we support. In **2 John 9-11**, the apostle John says these words, “*Everyone who goes on ahead and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God. Whoever abides in the teaching has both the Father and the Son. If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into your house or give him any greeting, for whoever greets him takes part in his wicked works.*” We need to be careful whom we support, or John

says, we take part in his wicked works. We cannot ignore this biblical principle – to change God’s teaching is offensive to God and consider wicked.

All of God’s word is sacred. To change any part of it or to go beyond its teaching is to ignore what is Divine and then if we just please ourselves we can offend God. You see when we change things we aren’t listening to the Lord. Man-made teachings step into a realm that belongs only to the Lord. We have no right to say to God, “our way is better than Your way, so we are changing it to fit our modern culture.” Those who teach false doctrines choose what is human over what is divine. This is actually defying God. And whether we teach a false doctrine or support a false teacher, we are guilty of committing an evil deed. It does matter to God whether or not we support error. Love means staying with God and His word.

What God says also matters to our destiny! Jesus said, “***The one who rejects me and does not receive my words has a judge; the word that I have spoken will judge him on the last day***” (**John 12:48**). We cannot select what we like in God’s teaching and ignore what we do not like, The standard, which will judge us on the last day, is God’s word. God is God, He doesn’t take opinion polls to determine the truth. We live in an age that stresses political correctness, but God is not subject to our culture. While we see changing opinions in our culture, God has spoken to all people in all places for all time (**Jude 3**). He will not change. And we cannot assume that God’s grace will include every idea that people embrace.

Instead of thinking that we can say and do religiously what we please, we should seek God’s face and follow His will. **The real issue is: Are we willing to yield our will to God’s will and make Him Lord of our lives? Are we willing to listen to Him and obey God?** Many people think they can live and believe as they desire and God won’t care! But God does care. We cannot believe man-made doctrine and man-made practices will please God. He wants us to follow His will and to give glory to His name. As you cannot serve God and mammon, you also cannot serve God and yourself.

Let’s read **Mt. 7:13-14**, “***Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few.***” These verses surprise many people. They would like to think that everyone is on the right road, but that is not the reality of things – by the way, the above words were the words of Jesus. This broad way is easy and filled with people. It is going to be popular but tragic. Not many people are willing to study for themselves to find out the truth by seeing what Jesus said – they are going to listen to popular false teachers of the day and walk the path of destruction.

Acting on our own wisdom, and our own judgment – we ignore the word of God and show a lack of faith in the wisdom of God. **Prov. 3:5-7** teaches, “***Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths. Be not wise in your own eyes; fear the LORD, and turn away from evil.***” We must believe God’s wisdom and turn from our own. God sees and knows things that we cannot see or know. His understanding is unlimited; and we need to trust that what He teaches is right. Even when we don’t understand why He says what He says, we need to trust His wisdom.

Let's take a look at ourselves. Let us consider what we believe and practice as Christians. "Are my beliefs the will of God or the will of man? Are my religious practices the will of God or the will of man? Can we read this teaching and find it in the New Testament? Or did this belief or practice come into use long after the apostles taught the gospel? Can we have confidence that this belief or action really is approved of by God?" A departure from the truth should have no place in the life of a faithful Christian. We must leave all teaching and practices that are not authorized in the New Testament!

We need to investigate our beliefs and practices by asking? "Is there a biblical command of the Lord, either from Jesus himself, or one of His N.T. apostles?" This would mean we would have to open our Bibles and begin a deeper study of God's word. If we find it is biblically approved, let us hold to this teaching or practice; but if it departs from the New Testament, we should abandon such teaching or practices.

In Germany there was a Lutheran Pastor's wife who taught that baptism was like a cup of milk coffee. It didn't matter if you added milk before you poured the coffee or after – you still had milk coffee. The problem is, the Bible didn't compare baptism to milk coffee. It compared it to a death, burial, and resurrection. Let me ask you a question: Is it important to bury a person before or after they die? And do you come back to life, before or after you die?

Baptism into Christ is a burial. The word baptize means, **"immersion"** and in the N.T. that immersion took place in water. **Romans 6:4** says, ***"We were buried therefore with Him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life."***

The Bible also teaches that the early church baptized only penitent believers. **Acts 2:41** says, ***"So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls."*** And again, in **Acts 8:1**, it says, ***"But when they believed Philip as he preached good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women."*** You see these were penitent people old enough to believe and receive the Word.

I have also known some who believed that they were saved by faith alone and didn't need to be baptized. **Mark 16:15-16** says, however, ***"And he said to them, "Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned."*** According to these verses, Jesus said that preaching and believing take place before baptism, and one is baptized before he is saved. Peter in **Acts 2:38** confirms this, ***"And Peter said to them, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."*** Paul also confirms this in **Acts 22:16**, he is telling about his own conversion when he said, ***"And now why do you wait? Rise and be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on his name."*** Both Peter and Paul confirm the teaching of Jesus in **Mark 16:15-16.** If you have been taught that baptism is not necessary to be saved, I ask you to study scripture. Just in the verses we examined this morning we have seen what is needed for salvation – preaching the

gospel, hearing the gospel, believing the gospel, and obeying the gospel. While it is true that faith is necessary for salvation, as we see, Scripture says, so is baptism.

While some think that every doctrine of every church is okay, and that every doctrine is as good as every other doctrine – the Bible teaches that there is only one truth, one gospel. Now it might sound neighborly to get along with everyone, but to believe everything is to believe nothing. It doesn't make sense to believe contradictory teaching and still think that everything is still true. Those that hold this idea aren't listening to God; they are listening to modern culture.

As we read earlier, **Gal. 1:6-9** teaches that there is only one gospel. If there is only one, there cannot be many. Would you want to accept a distorted gospel, realizing that it only leads to a separation from God? In the Bible we can read of the things God approves and teaches. We can know what He wills for our lives, and for our churches, and for our beliefs. We need to conform to His words in the New Testament. This is why we each need to study the Bible ourselves. Each of us needs to examine what we believe and see if it is according to what the Bible teaches.

God's declaration in **Mt. 17:5** was to listen to Jesus. It was relevant then, and it is relevant today as well. There are literally thousands of voices seeking our attention, but God points only to His Son Jesus. Moses was a great law giver, but God points to His Son. Elijah was one of the great prophets of God, but God points to His Son. Only Jesus has the words of life (Jn. 6:68). Let's listen to Him! Love Him, follow Him, obey Him, and serve Him. Studying the Bible is the only way for us to truly examine ourselves. Are you walking in the Lord's way?

We have mentioned in this lesson what you need to do to be saved? Are you ready?

Let's pray!