

Text: I John 3:23-24

Theme: Christian Living - The Condensed Version

April 22, 2018

Some of you can remember the era of Reader's Digest, a popular magazine of its day. Years later, Reader's Digest Condensed was released and it too was popular in its time. Today, most do very little reading. Instead, they skim or scan the internet looking for something of interest. The internet may not have been popular at the time St. John wrote the words of our text, yet his message for us is simple and condensed - believe and love. In simple terms, that's the condensed version of Christian living.

I. Our God has made Christian living so simple. A. Yet, we have complicated the simple. 1. We complicate the simple by functioning with selective faith. Selective faith is first focused on me, myself, and I. It says, "I can do it; I can handle it. I don't need anyone or anything." Then a crisis occurs and suddenly selective faith says, "I need help so let's see what faith can do." Instead of taking God at His Word, we pick and choose the parts that fit, that we think will help us and we ignore the rest. It sounds absurd, but it happens more than we realize. We, with all our perceived intelligence, complicate the simple because we think we know better than God.

2. We complicate the simple by choosing to ignore the simple. In our reading from Acts, how many days had Peter been teaching about the resurrection? In less than a day, Luke tells us that many of those who heard the word believed and the number of men came to about five thousand. Five thousand new church members in less than twenty-four hours? Wouldn't any church call that impressive? Many imagine that Christian living is filled with rules. But at the end of the day, Jesus keeps it simple - believe and love. If only we would do those two things. If only we would teach those two basics, Christian living would be viewed in a far better light.

3. We complicate the simple by practicing reciprocating love. How many of you know what reciprocating love is? Perhaps a bit different question, "How many of you know what a reciprocating saw does?" Reciprocating saws move forward and backward at a relatively fast speed. Reciprocating love says, "I'll treat you with love whenever you treat me with love. When you aren't loving, I won't be loving." Will that ever work? Can we extend Christian love only when someone else makes the first move? We complicate God's simple intentions when we practice a love that only gives after it receives, that only reciprocates when someone else makes the first move.

B. Since it's so easy to complicate the simple, what are the simple facts of Christian living condensed? 1. Fact #1 - Love put Christ on the cross. John writes in our Epistle, "By this we know love, that He laid down His life for us." Need a definition, an example? It's all there on the cross. The motivation? God so loved the world. Love's response? That He gave His only Son. The result? That whoever believes in Him should have eternal life. That's simple, simple enough for a child to understand and if it's simple enough for a child, it's simple enough for us. Pure and simple - love was the motivation that put Jesus on the cross so that we could enjoy eternal life.

2. Fact #2 - The simple saves. How much do you need to know to be saved? What's required for absolute certainty of heaven? Luke tells us that many who had

heard the word believed. That simple message brought five thousand people to faith in a single day. I'd call that impressive church growth! Believe. That's the condensed version. If you want it in a nutshell, "God so loved the world that He gave His only Son that whoever believes in Him should have eternal life." Did you catch that key word, that key phrase "whoever believes in Him?" That's all it takes. Simple faith. Simple belief. God keeps it simple because simple saves.

3. Fact #3 - We have a Good Shepherd. What does that statement imply? We must be the sheep, His sheep, and if we are His sheep, we possess something incredible, something amazing. We belong to a good Shepherd. But before we water down our Shepherd to match our definition of good, we need to define "good." Amazing, incredible, unbelievable, fantastic, loving, caring, understanding protective, One who knows everything about us, and that's just the beginning of our Good Shepherd. But John adds another phrase that we can't overlook, "And I lay down my life for the sheep." Believe it and it's yours. Simple and effective.

4. Fact #4 - He in us, and we in Him. John writes, "Whoever keeps His commandments abides in Him and He in them." How many of you have ever driven down a one-way street - backwards? The simple relationship we have with our God is a two-way street because God designed it that way. As He takes up residence in our hearts, He creates relationship. He turns the one-way into a two-way as He invites us to abide in Him, to communicate and build a relationship with Him. It's so simple, yet so amazing! Our Christian love is built on relationship. Because of our relationship with Him and His relationship with us, we create relationship with others.

5. Fact #5 - Our response is to love without exception. How many products are advertised on TV which are followed by an incredible list of fine print regarding potential side effects? How many stores have sales, but everything you wanted is excluded? Look at John's words, his believe and love words as he says, "And this is His commandment, that we believe in the name of His Son Jesus Christ and love one another." Any fine print or exceptions noted in that statement? Believe and love, the condensed version of Christian living says, "Love without exception. Love your neighbor as yourself. Love your enemies. Love everyone all the time."

6. Fact #6 - Make serving your passion. The condensed version could easily say, "Believe, love, serve," because one will naturally lead to the other. We see it in our text, "But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him?" In the eyes of God, serving is evidence that belief and love exist. Serving is actually our proof to ourselves that belief and love exist. The more eager we are to serve, to reach out to others, to be Christ with skin on to our neighbors, the more convinced and confident we are that we are living the Christian life God intended.

7. Reader's Digest and Reader's Digest Condensed may have left their mark on our world, but there's a far simpler way for you to leave your mark, to leave His mark. Believe and love - There's God's condensed version of Christian living. Amen.