

We are in the time of year when weddings are happening. And with June only a few days away--probably our most popular wedding month--weddings will be happening with even greater frequency. Traditionally, a part of every wedding ceremony is the bride and groom making their vows to each other. Some couples choose to write their own vows, while others find it fitting to use vows that have been spoken for decades, if not centuries. The primary vow that I've used in the ceremonies I've conducted is this one: **“In the name of God, I...take you...to have and to hold, from this day forward, for better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, as long as we both shall live.”** In this vow there is the promise to love. And while this vow does not include the word “obey,” there is that sense of honoring and respecting the needs and desires of the other person, as the words of this vow are spoken.

Wedding vows that are made in a marriage ceremony express an awesome commitment of the bride and groom to each other. These vows speak volumes as to how each spouse promises to treat the other not only for a day, but a lifetime. Interestingly, the image of a marriage was used to describe the relationship between Jesus and his people Israel. For in John 3:29, John the Baptist identifies himself as the friend of the bridegroom, who is Jesus. And John acknowledges that through his own ministry of preaching and baptizing he's pointing Israel, who is the bride, to Jesus, the bridegroom.

And what kind of vows did Jesus make with his people? The truth is that these vows, these promises, follow in the train of the promises that God made with his people from the beginning of Old Testament times. In Deut. 7 we read these words of God conveyed to the people through Moses: **“For you are a people holy to the Lord your God; (who) has chosen you to be a people for his own possession, ...because the Lord loves you and...has...redeemed you from the house of bondage, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt. Know therefore that the Lord your God...keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments, to a thousand generations...”**

Throughout OT history the ongoing desire of God toward *his people* in all of his activities in the world has been this: **“I will be their God and they shall be my people.”** God's desire is to live in a close relationship with all of his *human creation*, and that *we* would also live in a close relationship of loving obedience with him. The very first Commandment God gave Moses was: **“You shall have no other gods before me.”** God is saying: “I don't want you to have anything or anyone competing with me in your life. I want to be the love of your life today, and every day, because I love you with a love that will never end, and I created you so that we could live in a loving relationship--I, as your holy God and you, as my holy people, to be set apart as God-focused people in the world, so that others will see in your life my reflection, and be drawn into a relationship with me, so that ultimately the whole world would be in a relationship of loving obedience with me, now and forever.

So when we hear today's Gospel in John 14, which continues Jesus' farewell address to his disciples, we're not hearing something new, but rather a continuation of the expression of this divine, eternal theme: **of God desiring to be in a relationship with his people, where love and obedience are the ties that bind this relationship together.** For in John 14:15 Jesus says very simply: **“If you love me, you will keep my commandments.”** “If you love me, you will follow the directions that I've given you. And what you'll come to know over time is that living this way, will be for you, a path of blessing.”

And what are these blessing that come to us when we love God by living in obedience to his commandments?

1. First, Jesus tells us that he'll ask the Father to bless us with the gift of the Holy Spirit. And the Holy Spirit's presence in our lives brings even more gifts, because it's the Holy Spirit who teaches us through the Word of God, guides us onto the path pleasing to our Lord, gives us the strength to live as his people in challenging times, and comes alongside us in times of trouble to bring us comfort and healing. The Spirit also brings forth fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, and more. *And this is the proof that the Spirit is having its way in our lives, when these fruit are coming out of our lives.*

2. Second, when we love God by obeying him, the Spirit helps us to see things not only through our own eyes, but through God's eyes; meaning, our perspective changes. We begin to see more clearly how God is working in our lives and in the world. We begin to put more value on the ways of God rather than on the things of earth. Yet, as a result, we may find ourselves out of sync with the world, *for Jesus said: "The world can't receive the Spirit (or the things of the Spirit), because it neither sees him nor knows him."*

3. Third, when we love God by living in obedience to him we will find our relationship with him deepening every day. We'll become more aware of, and want to be in greater harmony with God's will for us. We'll take greater care to avoid those behaviors that are sinful and put barriers between us and God. *And we'll become more like Joseph of the OT, who, when tempted by Potiphar's wife, instantly recognized what was happening, saying: "How then can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?"*

4. Fourthly, when we love God by living in obedience to him, God will reveal more and more of himself to us. *In our human relationships, the closer we are to a person, the more we share with them about ourselves.* When we obey God, we are saying to him: "I love you. I trust you. And I want to be close to you." When we open ourselves to God in this way, God will entrust us with more of who he is, because he knows that we are ready and willing to receive more of who he is.

5. Finally, when we love God by living in obedience to him, God will give us more responsibility to love in the world. *In the Parable of the Talents, those who fulfilled the task their master had given them were given more responsibilities as a reward.* And this is how it is for us also. As we express in the world the love that God first gave to us, God will call us to even great expressions of love going forward.

So as our Lord Jesus lived a life of loving obedience to his Heavenly Father while he was on earth, which resulted in the salvation of the world, may we also hear and accept this same call to love and obedience, so that others may receive the gift of God's saving love, as well. Amen.