

Thursday, May 11, 2017 – Living for and Serving God

Joshua 24:14-15 - "Now therefore, fear the Lord, serve Him in sincerity and in truth, and put away the gods which your fathers served on the other side of the River and in Egypt. Serve the Lord! And if it seems evil to you to serve the Lord, choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord."

Joshua reminds the Israelites of all that Jehovah God had done for them starting with Abraham. All that they have comes from God originating out of His love for them and the care he bestows upon those that He loves. The call was for Israel to remember, recognize and provide the proper reverence to God by reciprocating their love for him through their service to Him. It is a reminder and pattern applicable to us thousands of years later.

From an early age we have the notion engrained in our mind that happiness and fulfillment can and will only come from our possessions, status, etc. However, so many scriptures teach us differently.

Matthew 6:19-21 - "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Matthew 16:26 - For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?

1 Timothy 6:9 - But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and *into* many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition.

2 Peter 3:10 - But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything done in it will be laid bare.

There is no possible way for us to be happy, fulfilled or satisfied in the pursuit of the things of this world. True joy and contentment can only be found in a life dedicated to service to God. It has been said, "Joy is the gigantic secret of the Christianity." This certainly agrees with what Paul said to the Philippian Christians, "Rejoice in the Lord always and again I say rejoice" (Phil. 4:4).

During the 1985 Freed Hardeman lectures, Jimmy Mankin delivered a sermon titled, "A Christian is Joyful." In that sermon he proposed three major reasons why the Christian was joyful:

- 1) Look who our Savior is - We rejoice because of the Savior that we have. God's Son, the Prince of Peace, the Lord of Glory, is our Savior. This brings rejoicing to us in any circumstance of life. We are connected with the everlasting one. We can rejoice in the Lord who is our Savior. We can know this Savior and Lord. Jesus identifies with us. and we can only echo the words of Peter, "Whom not having seen ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice greatly with joy unspeakable and full of glory: receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls" (1 Peter 1:8-9).
- 2) Rejoice in what the Lord has Done - We rejoice because Jesus was willing to go to the cross for us. This is inconceivable to us that God in his rich mercy and out of his love, would send Jesus to the cross in our behalf "For while we were yet weak, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. But God commendeth his love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:6-8). We can rejoice because Jesus was willing to die for you and me. It is at Calvary we see how far God was willing to go in saving the world. He reveals his great redemption scheme by going all the way to the cross. He was willing to be that perfect lamb for sacrifice. He took our place by dying on the cross so that we could be saved. This wonderful salvation that Christ brings means that his death was the sacrifice for our atonement, but his resurrection gives us power for living every day. We now have the saving power that gives us reason for living, "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who lived, but Christ who lives in me" (Gal. 2:20). Because Christ lives, I now have the hope of living; I do not serve a dead Savior but a risen one. Because of this, I believe that Christ will give me everything that is good that I need.
- 3) Rejoice in what Christ has Promised - The Christian today can rejoice even in tribulation because we have peace within us. "Count it all joy, my brethren, when you meet various trials, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its perfect effect. you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing" (Jas. 1:3-4). A Christian can rejoice, even in this world with tribulation because of the peace of Christ. Jesus has promised us eternal life. We know that one day we can leave this world and all of its anxiety and trouble behind. We have a home in heaven that is reserved for us. We have a place with God and with Christ Jesus our Lord. Some of the most beautiful words that Jesus ever uttered are these: "In my father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you so; for I go to prepare a place for you. If I go and prepare a place for you. I will come again, and receive you unto myself; but where I am, there ye may be also" (John 14:2-3). This home in heaven will be ours to enjoy forever. What joy, what glory will be present because we can be with our Savior.

God is worthy of human service **simply because of who he is!** As His created beings, we retain a subservient role to our creator. Paul emphasizes this point in Romans 9:21. How then should we serve?

Acknowledging our joy for all that the Lord has given us should implore us to serve Him for, and with, all our lives. No task is too mighty or insignificant for a child of God to participate in. We turn our attention again to Christ and the example he left us.

The same hands that would be pierced for humanity's sin were willing to serve and were used to illustrate the greatest lesson in humility in the history of the world. Jesus did not wash the disciples' feet as an act of worship but as an act of service. Possibly, in retrospect, some of the proud disciples wished they had washed the feet of Jesus and the other disciples; however, at the time, not one person other than Jesus was willing to serve. The disciples seemed preoccupied with who was greatest within the apostleship (Luke 22:24-30).

Why is serving God so hard? Because we live in a world where self-interest motivates people (3 John 9-10). Everyone wants their own "rights" upheld and defended, without any consideration of others. Freedom of speech now means people can use profanity anywhere and anytime they want. It says a woman can murder her unborn baby simply because she doesn't want the child. Clearly selfishness and pride overrule good conduct, but God teaches us to put others before ourselves (1 Cor. 10:24). Our **first step** on the road to service is becoming the type of person God calls us to be. The question truly becomes this for the converted: "What influences and forces do I, as one guided by the words of Jesus Christ, allow to shape who and what I am?" It is what I allow to shape me that determines who I am and what I do. Are those forces to be ambition? For what? Success? How do I determine its existence? Material accomplishments? The pursuit of pleasure? What defines my joy? Societies' expectations? Will I allow people who do not know or love God to decide who I am and what I do?

For the Christian, conversion is about something much greater than obeying a few instructions. As important as such commands are, conversion is about a new direction for one's life. The converted come to God through Jesus Christ in order to change directions in life. One's faith does not lead him/her to repent and to be baptized in order to continue to live as he/she always lived. Purposes change. Values change. Behavior changes. Moral concepts change. The converted look at commitments, relationships, promises, and the treatment of people in an entirely different manner.

It is not easy serving God because of how He expects us to treat others. The Bible talks about loving family and friends, and there is not too much difficulty with that. However, we're commanded to love our enemies, which is not natural (Matt 5:43-48). Christians must not retaliate when mistreated, but that is exactly what we may want to do (Rom. 12:19). We take the gospel to the lost, but some of those may be the most despicable and profane people of the world. It is just not natural to show kindness and goodness to such individuals.

It is hard to serve the Lord because His ways are not our ways. It is not enough to believe in God, we must accept and obey the true and living God. From the beginning of time, man has invented his own method of service based on his personal idea of deity.

We would do well to remember the prophet's words, "For My thoughts are not your thoughts, Nor are your ways My ways," says the LORD" (Isa. 55:8). God is higher and greater than us in every way (Isa. 55:9). People reject God's plain truth about salvation or express dissatisfaction with His simple requirements because they don't fit their ways and thoughts. Read the story of Naaman for a better understanding of this point (2 Kings 5:1-15).

When Jesus washed the feet of His disciples, we see that the Lord got up and went to those he was going to serve. Might I suggest that our **second step** in serving the Lord is to look for opportunities to serve. This is far different than sitting around waiting for someone to ask you to serve. Proactiveness is often too difficult for people to achieve because it takes them out of their comfort zone, so their efforts to serve are doomed before they start.

Paul reminds us in 1 Corinthians 15:58, Christians can have courage in all circumstances because Christ will give them the victory. In order for Christians to have this victory, they must be faithful. The resurrection proves their labor will be rewarded. They must be steadfast. This means they must stand firm in their convictions and remain faithful.

"Wherefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work (service) of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labor is not vain in the Lord."

Unmovable means they must not let others sway them or move them from their positions. Always abounding in the work of the Lord means they are not to grow weary or discouraged in their obedience to God (Galatians 6:9).

My desire is to preach fulltime. Those opportunities don't often present themselves because I also have a secular job. Does the bible state anywhere that I must give up one to do the other? No. Does the fact I'm not able to preach fulltime and keep my secular job remove the command I have been given, along with everyone else, to preach the word? Absolutely not!

Matthew 28:18-20 - And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." Amen.

2 Timothy 4:1-2 - I charge you therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom: Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching.

Spreading the word of God is the duty of all His children. Paul states, “Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ’s behalf, be reconciled to God. For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.” (2 Cor. 5:20- 21) An ambassador is a representative commissioned by someone who is supreme to speak on his behalf. This word indicates responsibility and authority. It is our duty to proclaim faithfully and precisely the message entrusted to us by Jehovah. It was Paul’s duty to preach the gospel and plead with men to obey it that they might be saved and reconciled to God.

We lose too many opportunities to spread the gospel because some have embraced a philosophy that unless you have attended a “preaching school” or “Christian University” you aren’t qualified to preach. Please let me know when you find out where Moses, Paul, Peter or any of the apostles attended preaching school and I’ll attend with you. Hint – they didn’t attend one!

2 Timothy 3:10-17 - But you have carefully followed my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, longsuffering, love, perseverance, persecutions, afflictions, which happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium, at Lystra—what persecutions I endured. And out of them all the Lord delivered me. Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution. But evil men and impostors will grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived. But you must continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them, and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.

Hebrews 4:11-13 - Let us therefore be diligent to enter that rest, lest anyone fall according to the same example of disobedience. For the word of God *is* living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things *are* naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we *must give* account.

The world where we live and into which we are sent is not friendly to godliness. Jesus said: “The world cannot hate you, but it hates Me because I testify of it that its works are evil” (John 7:7). Paul would learn by extreme cruelty just how much the world hated our Lord. He wrote as “an ambassador in chains” and asked the Ephesian Christians to pray for him that “I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak” (Eph. 6:20). This should be our attitude also.

No greater place for this bold speaking to begin than in our homes. Our children will be influenced in their lives by either godly sources or ungodly. Which will they be exposed to in your home? As I have been reminded, we can always be a spiritual influence in our children's lives regardless their age.

Our service can be come in many forms. Consider involving yourself in any and/or all of the following:

- 1) Become involved in the youth group at your congregation. Too many parents are looking for a "youth minister" to be responsible for the spiritual growth and development of their children. We have no greater resource in the Lord's church than those who have raised children in the Lord. We are losing 70-80% of our children once they leave home. These are souls that once were God's which now have been influenced by the wiles of Satan. If we love one another the way God calls us to, we should be doing everything in our power to provide the proper influence for our children and show them how much they are loved.
- 2) Become involved in the benevolence work of your congregation. Benevolence is much more than just money. The Lord's church does so much work in this area. We need stock and organize our local pantry, organize clothing and/or other supplies that might be needed. There is a great need for follow up work to ensure those we have helped understand we care as much about their spiritual self as their physical self.
- 3) Become in the visitation program of your local congregation. Visitation is more than just follow up with weekly visitors. We have members of each local body that deal with physical issues and we do a good job of ensuring they are cared for and reminded we miss them. However, our greater need comes in reminding those who are spiritually sick that they are loved, remembered and missed! When is the last time you dropped someone a note, picked up the phone or visited someone you have noticed is missing from gathering of the saints? You would be amazed at how big a difference of reminder you are loved can make.
- 4) Become involved in World Bible School. Whether it is through your own congregation or through the internet, help is always needed in grading tests, and sending material out to the thousands who desire to study the bible each month.

There are so many other opportunities to serve God the greatest service you can provide is being the spiritual example, in both word and in deed, that God calls us to be inside and outside of the church.

I. We must serve only the LORD!

A. Jesus told Satan that he must serve the LORD only (Matthew 4:10).

B. If one serves the Lord, he cannot serve anyone or anything else. He may not have two masters (Matthew 6:24; Galatians 1:10).

C. Zacharias prophesied that we may serve the LORD "without fear, in holiness and righteousness before Him all the days of our life" (Luke 1:74-75).

1) If we are afraid to serve Him, we will have our part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone (Revelation 21:8).

2) There is nothing to fear in serving God; by seeking first His kingdom and righteousness, all things will be added to us (Matthew 6:33).

D. To serve the Lord, we must do three things (Matthew 16:24-26):

- 1) Deny ourselves
- 2) Take up our cross
- 3) Follow Him.

II. Jesus taught us how to serve the Lord in two ways.

A. He taught us how to serve the Lord by His words (Matthew 20:26-28).

B. He taught us how to serve the Lord by example (John 13:1-17; Philippians 2:7).

III. Serving the LORD has its rewards.

A. Those who serve the Lord will receive the reward of the inheritance (Colossians 3:23-24).

B. By serving Him, the LORD gives us the kingdom and eternal life (Matthew 25:31-46).

We too must make a choice: should we serve people or things; should we serve the LORD? If we choose the latter, we will be eternally rewarded!

In Christ,

Chuck