

Stewardship Sunday – Christ’s Love, Our Calling – October 24, 2010

Based on Joshua 24:14-24 written by Pastor Paul Horn

SEEK FAMILY TIME

1. TO REVIEW WHAT GOD HAS DONE

2. TO REPENT OF WHAT WE HAVE DONE

3. TO RENEW YOUR FAMILY IN ITS SERVICE TO GOD

If you had to move, and you knew that hardships and difficulties were waiting for you, would you go? In the case of a Soldier facing deployment, you really have no choice. At least you don’t have to bring your family into danger. I wonder what Jacob was thinking when the LORD told him to move his family to Egypt to live with his son Joseph. Jacob already knew what the LORD had told his grandfather, Abraham, “Your descendants will be strangers in a foreign land, they will become enslaved and mistreated for 400 years.” (Genesis 15:13-16) But Jacob also had the promise the LORD made to him and his grandfather, “I will bring your people out from this land. I will bring them back to this land that you now stand.”

Push the fast forward button 400+ years to our lesson this morning. Jacob’s descendants stand on the same piece of property as their forefathers, now 2million people strong. When Jacob moved to Egypt, his family was only 70 in number. At the helm of the ship is Commander Joshua, successor to Moses, who led the people into Canaan, destroying all cities that inhabited their inheritance. Now, after years of war, there is peace, and the people have full possession the Promised Land. Their leader Joshua gathers the nation of Israel at a city called Shechem, 30miles north of Jerusalem.

Shechem was a landmark city for the Israelites. It was at Shechem over 400 year ago, that the LORD first promised to Abraham that his descendants would inherit this land. It is fitting that at Shechem Joshua now reminds the people of God’s promise and reviews what God has done for his people to get them here... The strength of the LORD’s arm in the 10 plagues and the crossing of the Red Sea, the power of God displayed on Mt. Sinai, 40 years of wandering and God providing meat, water and bread, the crossing of the Jordan River into the Promised Land, the walls of Jericho crumbling, the Israelites destroying any army that stood in their way.

Here at Shechem Joshua encourages each and every Israelite to renew their commitment to him who committed to them; to recommit to serving and loving above all others the one who loved and served them. “**Now fear the LORD,**” not be afraid of him, but fear as in show awe and reverence. “**Serve the LORD with all faithfulness,**” in grateful obedience with undivided allegiance. In order to fear and serve the LORD, step one: vs14 **throw away the gods your fathers served.**

Think about that one... Joshua is addressing believers, pleading with them to throw away their idols that they had worshiped in Egypt! The golden calf episode demonstrated the influence of

Egyptian religion. But even after all that the LORD had done for them, their fathers still passed down to their children the gods they clung to. Whether these were physical idols of precious metals and stone and wood or the selfish attitudes of their hearts, idolatry still clung to the hearts of believers!

This was an important warning, especially considering the piece of real estate they had taken possession of. Canaanites still lived in the surrounding territories with their gods of wood and stone. They would be a great temptation to the Israelites to forsake the LORD who had done so much for them.

Joshua continued, Vs15 **If this is disagreeable, choose this day whom you will serve.** Remember that Joshua is speaking to believers, who had their hearts changed by the Holy Spirit to follow God. The unconverted do not have the power within themselves to choose the Lord and become believers. That power comes from God alone. Joshua is calling for a choice from people who already own the gift of faith. They can choose: idols of wood, stone and metal or the living, powerful, gracious LORD? Gods who are powerless to help their worshippers keep their land or the LORD who has just given his people that same land? Gods who brought their people defeat or the God who brought you where you are today? Choose!

This year our stewardship emphasis focuses on the time God blesses us with. Today, we are looking at the time God gives me to spend with my family. Since time is a gift from God, I will make every effort to manage it well. I have to ask myself daily, “How will I spend my time today?” What does God say about my time with my family? What is my place within the family? That will determine how I spend my time.

A parent at the baptismal font makes a promise before God to raise the child in the training and instruction of the Lord. As parents or grandparents who are raising children, we have to choose how we spend our time with the children entrusted to our care. Are teaching them to spend time with God and his Word or are we teaching them to bow down to something other than God? To answer that question, we only need to look through their eyes. They observe very keenly how we spend our time.

As husband and wife, do we choose to make time with God’s Word together or do we choose to bow down to the idols of internet and cable television?

As a single person, are you choosing to serve the gods of this age, which tell you to fall down and worship your body and what feels good to you, and to ignore what you have been taught, or do you choose to serve your God who says, **“Listen, my son, to your father’s instruction and do not forsake your mother’s teaching. They will be a garland to grace your head and a chain to adorn your neck.”** (Proverbs 1:8-9)

If we are guilty of bowing down to idols rather than our God, we need to listen to Martin Luther’s rebuke from his Large Catechism... “Oh, what mad, senseless fools are we that, while we must ever live and dwell among such mighty enemies as the devils are, we nevertheless despise our weapons and defense (the Word of God), and are too lazy to look at or think of

them!” (*Concordia*, pg.380, paragraphs 15-16) Our God calls us to repent! Turn away from your worthless idols and turn to your God, who alone forgives.

Another interesting fact about Shechem... do you remember when Jacob ran away from his brother Esau? He stopped at a town called Bethel, and had a vision that night of the angels of God ascending and descending a stairway that reached from heaven to earth. In that dream the LORD made a promise to Jacob that he would be with him on his journey and that he would bring him back to Bethel. When Jacob woke up, he made a covenant to God, to worship him when he returned. Years later, on his way back to Bethel, Jacob stopped at Shechem. Do you know what he did there? He took all the gods that his household was worshipping and he buried them beneath a tree.

Here we stand at the tree, the cross, with the idols that we have ripped out of our hearts. There at the cross we ask Christ to bury the sinful attitudes of our hearts, for we cannot dispose of them properly. And he willingly chooses to take our sins in himself. He chooses to receive the punishment our sins deserve. He chooses to die with our sins and there in the tomb have them buried with his body. At the tree of the cross your sins of idolatry are buried, never to be seen again. And there at the cross, God the Father announces forgiveness of sins to you. Although we have bowed down to other gods, although we have loved other things and ourselves more than our God, here is the proof that he still loves you more.

God makes a promise to us at the baptismal font. At the font, where Christ’s command attaches to water that is sprinkled, God made a promise to you that your sins have been washed away, that your sinful nature has been drowned. At the font God made a promise to you that he has created in you a new spirit.

Lest we be tempted to dig up our old idols, let us return to waters of our baptism, and be reminded of what our God has done for us. Lest we be enticed to resurrect the idols that we have buried in Christ’s death, let us return to the Word of God and hear his sure promises, let us be reminded of what our God has done for us, because through his promises he renews us. We in turn renew our families in service to him.

Listen to Commander Joshua’s commitment ... in front of the whole assembly of Israelites he says, **“As for me and my household we will serve the LORD.”** Joshua’s confession is intriguing since he wouldn’t be around much longer. He would die soon. So why pledge his faithfulness for his whole house when he soon wouldn’t be around to ensure that? This confession at such a ripe age teaches us that we never retire from serving the Lord. There’s a sticker that I see on the bumpers of many vehicles in this town, “Retired Army and Still Serving.” As long as we are on this earth, we will choose to serve the Lord.

Joshua’s confession is also a reminder to fathers that God has established us as responsible for the spiritual welfare of the home. In the case of a single mother, she becomes the leader of that home. She chooses to take the lead for the family in spiritual matters. In our families, it is our responsibility, children, teens and adults, but especially as parents, to make sure God’s mouth is open in our homes, that his words are being heard and adhered. We are concerned our kids have three square meals a day. How much more concerned are we that they receive their regular

spiritual nourishment! And for ourselves, that we encourage each other to recommit to God's Word everyday.

Maybe we start off small, with 5 minutes a day reading our Meditations devotion book, or a Forward in Christ magazine article; maybe we download the Bible onto an MP3 player and listen on the way to work. But we will recommit ourselves to family time, and give family members the opportunity to make time for God's Word, and God's Word will renew our families in service to him. Tonight, sit down and reorder your time with family. And choose this day whom you will serve. Amen.