



MORRISON ZION EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

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February 6, 2011

Epiphany 5

Sermon Text: [Joshua 24:14-24](#)

Pastor Randy Ott

First Lesson: [Joshua 24:14-24](#)

Psalm of the Day: [Psalm 111](#)

Second Lesson: [1 Peter 2:9-12](#)

Gospel Lesson: [Matthew 5:13-20](#)

We Will Serve The Lord!

A Plan, A Problem, A Promise

I suppose many of you have just been longing for this day to finally get here now that the game will be played today. You probably can't wait for it. All the players that put their head on the pillow last night and probably had a hard time falling asleep, do you think any of them thought to themselves, "There's no use playing tomorrow. We're going to lose." I have to believe that all through the week every single one of them thought, "We're going to win." They might be worried about the problems and the obstacles to overcome. They might be worried about how they are going to perform and things like that, but not a single one of them doesn't think in their hearts that they have the opportunity, they have the ability, and that they will win the game. But by the end of the day when they finally go to bed whenever they go to bed, there is going to be one whole group of them that is going to be really upset, right? No matter how much they wanted to, they couldn't win the game and they didn't win the game. And I suppose somewhere in Chicago it will all be Jay Cutler's fault that they lost. That's just the way it is. You can have all the intentions in the world that you want. You can't do exactly what you want. It doesn't work that way.

You and I love the Lord. We want to serve the Lord. We are just like these Israelites that say, "Don't tell us we're not going to, we are going to serve the Lord. I love him. I want to serve him. I'm going to serve him." We have that as our plan, but there is a problem. The problem is us. And the only solution is God's promise.

This section here from Joshua where this whole group of people that have all these great intentions to serve the Lord and they repeat it over and over in this covenant renewal ceremony reminds me of what I went through when I was a real little kid. It was at the supper table. I don't remember what it was that I was unwilling to eat. I think it was peas. But there was a battle of wills between myself and my father, and guess who won. Dad won, just like he always did as a kid when I was growing up. And as I was enduring some of the consequences of my expression of my own will, I think there were probably some tears running down my cheeks, I came to the conclusion, "This just isn't worth it. From now on, for the rest of my life, I'm doing whatever Dad says. I'm not going to disobey him anymore. I just don't want to go through this stuff. This isn't worth it. I'm going to obey him in everything he does. After all, I love him and I look up to him. I'm going to serve him. I'm going to do what he says." Guess how that worked out for me.

It's the same thing with the Israelites. Joshua had just gone over everything God had done for the Israelites. He was the guy sitting there. He died at 110 and this is shortly before he died. They had taken possession of the land. All the people that were gathered there together, they didn't live in Egypt like he did. They didn't know the slavery they went through. That whole generation died in the desert because they wouldn't do what God had said. So he takes them through it again. He talks about that land of slavery. He talks about how the Lord took care of them as they wandered 40 years in the wilderness and their clothes didn't wear out. God had been good to them in spite of how they had turned away from him. And now God had given them this land that God himself described as "a land with cities that you didn't build. You are harvesting fields that you did not clear. You are enjoying the benefits from wine presses you did not build. I gave it all to you. I did it all for you."

So Joshua reminds them of all of this and then he goes over the Laws again, the Book of the Law of Moses. He says, "These are all the things God wants you to do. Here is what you have to do. You have to serve the Lord. You are God's people. He chose you. He has made you his own. But in your weakness of faith, some of you are still chasing these other gods. You can't do both. As people of God, you have to say, 'I want to serve God.'" That's what they said. "We'll do it."

I told you he was up there in age, right? Doesn't he sound like that old guy in the neighborhood that's always yelling at kids, "Get off my grass!" when he tells them "You can't do it!" He says, "*You are not able to serve the LORD. He is a holy God; he is a jealous God. He will not forgive your rebellion and your sins. If you forsake the LORD and serve foreign gods, he will turn and bring disaster on you and make an end of you, after he has been good to you.*" He lays it out for them, and everything he says is true. God will not forgive them because of anything in them. They would not be able to keep all of these laws perfectly. For them it wasn't just the moral law like it is for us. It was also the civil law...how they were to be governed. It was the ceremonial laws...the things they were to do in their worship life and all the sacrifices of abstaining from certain foods and all these things. They were supposed to do it all, and they were saying, "We will do it all." They had every good intention in the world, but the problem to carrying that out was themselves. Just like for you and for me...the problem is us. We've met the enemy. The enemy is "me." There's a part of me that loves God and wants to serve God with my whole heart. Then there's another part of me and there's a part of you, that sinful nature, that doesn't want to and it wants us to go our own way and do our own thing. If you know the history of the children of Israel, that's what they did.

After Joshua died, the period of the Judges came. It was one of the darkest periods in the history of the children of Israel where everyone did his own thing...did as they saw fit in their own eyes. They just said, "We will serve the Lord," and then they went and did what they wanted to do because it was all about them. Just like our sinful nature wants to tell us, it's all about us. They didn't love the Lord. They loved themselves more than they loved God. They didn't love their neighbor as themselves. They loved themselves as they loved themselves.

Unfortunately you and I do the same thing. Our good intentions to serve the Lord are often untracked because we feel underappreciated, so it really becomes all about us. We feel undervalued, so it really becomes all about us. No one is noticing all of our hard work, so we're not going to do it. Or maybe we just don't get the point of doing the hard work because we just get lazy. And "You know what? I put myself on the line in the work place. I don't want to put myself on the line for my God." We fail God. We sin. And God should not forgive us for our wickedness and rebellion because God has said be holy as he is holy, not just be the best you can be. If you want to do that, join the army. If you want to be with God, he says be holy as the Lord your God is holy. You and I can't do it. You read that verse that says he will not forgive your rebellion and all your sins...and if you're honest with yourself, you have to start thinking, "I don't know how I'm going to get to sleep tonight." That's a scary verse.

So what is the answer? What is the promise? Look in there. Do you see any promise of God anywhere in any of those paragraphs that I read to you? Didn't Jesus say over and over, "Him who has ears, let him hear"? If the children of Israel were listening, there is one word that is repeated over and over in here, and they knew what this word meant. This was a special word. This was a word that pointed them to God's promise, not to their actions. Take a look at the bulletin. Look at those paragraphs from Joshua. Can you see the word? Can you find it? For them, this would be like you're bobbing at sea and you need a life preserver...that's what this word would be for them that day. Did you find it yet? It's not "and." It's all over in there, and it's in all capital letters each time. Now you should be able to figure it out. Do you see it there? The word "LORD." Look at how many times...let your eyes run down the sheet. Look at how many times it says the "LORD." The NIV translates it by putting it in all capital letters. That's to show us that this is the Hebrew word "Yahweh." It's not El Shaddai, not God Almighty who is going to crush you like a bug because you're a sinner. It's Yahweh, the God of the covenant, the God of grace, the God who makes and keeps his promises because that's who he is, not because of anything we do.

The people would have known from Moses' and from Joshua's teaching the sermon on the name of the Lord which God preached to Moses in Exodus 34. Here's what God said about this name. He said, "*he passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children and their children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation.*" ([Exodus 34:6, 7](#)). In that name, the "LORD," you have the truth that God is pure grace. He is pure undeserved love. He does not treat us as our sins deserve, and he's also just. He will punish sin. You and I at times can't connect how he can do both at the same time, but he does. When that name, the "LORD," is spoken over and over to these people, it's a reminder that this is a God who, yes, will punish sin, but he is the God of the covenant that has made you his chosen people. That's what these people should have heard. God acted to do all this for you. In fact, the guy talking to them and the truth that they were living in cities they didn't build were pictures of God's grace, weren't they?

Joshua's name originally was Hosea, which means "salvation." As he served the Lord, it was changed to Joshua, "the Lord saves," the Hebrew name that is Jesus for us in the New Testament...the same exact name. Just like Joshua led them into the land and they conquered the land, so they had this land that they didn't deserve and they hadn't earned, Jesus conquered sin and gives us a land we haven't earned, the land we don't deserve...the land that is living in the knowledge that we are forgiven because he took away our sins, living in the knowledge that heaven is ours, not because of who we are but because of who he is, because he is the LORD.

When you read the word the "LORD," that ought to scream to you that God loves you because God is love. So if you hear these words of Joshua, for those people, those who had ears to hear, they would have heard the promise of the covenant. That's the promise that sustains us. That's the promise that brings us joy no matter who wins a game or who loses a game. The promise that brings us eternal joy is "I'm forgiven, even though I could do nothing to bring about that forgiveness myself."

Then, because I'm forgiven, I want to do what God wanted the Israelites to do and what he wants me to do and what he wants you to do. That's to live in response to him, to get rid of the false God of ourselves and put him first and live for him. When we live for God, that's how we let our light shine. That's how people notice that we're different. We're not so self absorbed and we are concerned about being kind and loving. We are concerned about helping others when they are broken and reaching out to them with the love of Christ when they are hurting.

As we let our light shine, God is glorified, we are blessed, and those who don't know Christ and don't live in that forgiveness will be attracted and want to know why. Then the Holy Spirit will use people like you and me to share the Gospel. That's our privilege.