

“We’ll Leave the Light on for You”

Joshua 24:14-15; 1 Thess 4:13-18; Matthew 25:1-13

Just this week I was commenting on the impact of our culture on what stays with us in our memories. For instance, how many of us can remember the lyrics from the ‘pop music’ in our ‘misspent youth’ (well, at least for SOME of us) MUCH more readily than we can information of REAL value... like say, for instance, **God’s Word!** Along with music lyrics, advertising jingles/slogans also become imbedded in our ‘long-term memory.’ Like, for example, the one which gives us our sermon title for today: **“We’ll leave the light on for you.”** Which is the popular slogan for... **Motel 6.** (OK, WAY too easy. For bonus points, can you name the ‘pitch man’ who made that slogan famous? **Tom Bodette.**)

So, what do you think made this slogan so memorable? IMHO, it was because of what ‘leaving the light on’ can mean us. It represents **home.** It represents **hospitality.** It stands for a **sign of welcome** for those who are **coming in** to that **place of security and rest.** Like our own personal homes, it reminds us of a place where whenever we leave, we **know** that **we will come back again.** Why? Because of the **care and concern** that has been **demonstrated** to us...

In our Scriptures today... particularly in the words of Paul and Jesus... we are also considering a place we are to think of as ‘home.’ A place of ‘hospitality’ into which we desire to be ‘welcomed’ to ‘come in’ to find ‘security and rest.’ Today, may we be reminded of how our Triune God... God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit... demonstrates to us their care and concern... reassuring us of their **promise** that **‘We’ll leave the light on for you.’**

It is God’s **promise to welcome home His faithful travelers** that I was reminded of when I read the passage from *Thessalonians*. For aside from *John 14*, where Jesus speaks to the disciples about **‘the way to the place where I am going,’** there are few Scriptures more significant to me concerning ‘God’s promise to welcome home His faithful travelers’ than these verses from *1 Thessalonians 4*. Most often, this is one of the key passages I use in a Service of Witness to the Resurrection (aka, a funeral service) to communicate the truth that the grave is

NOT the end. *However...* before we consider the HOPE of that pericope, we should first take heed of the other two, and the HELP that they offer in coming to **realize** that 'hope.'

First, there are those familiar words of Joshua 24:15... an 'abridged version' which hangs in MANY a Christian's kitchen, living room, or hallway. ***"Choose you this day whom you will serve...but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord."*** How many of YOU have one? Great statement, RIGHT? The better question is, how many of us LIVE UP to it? The use of such plaques or shelf adornments, too often, can amount to just so much 'lip service.' It's like those 'fish' that many folks put on their car. How many of those have you had the opportunity to see one UP CLOSE AND PERSONAL... just about the time that the driver cuts you off in traffic while giving you the 'finger salute?' Be they sayings or emblems, 'Pithy Pious Platitudes' (try saying THAT 3 times fast!) are all well and good... but do we really LIVE them out for all to see...?

This passage is like so many other of our favorites... we should consider the **context** in which they are found. How many of you knew the phrase just before the command to 'Choose?' ***"If you are unwilling to serve the Lord..."*** (Joshua 24:15) Kind of puts Joshua's 'Triple-P' in a little different light, doesn't it? Rather than an 'evangelistic' plea for non-believers, this sounds more like an ironic **challenge** to those who call themselves 'believers.'

And indeed, that is what it is. If we look at the larger body of this last chapter of Joshua, it is not too unlike the last chapter of Deuteronomy, in that it is the closing days of one of the Israelites great leaders. And here, Moses' successor Joshua has convened a meeting of the leaders of God's Chosen Ones in order to reaffirm their covenant promises to YHWH. This **covenant** would not be too unlike **treaties**, or **agreements**, typically used to formalize relations between powerful sovereign nations and smaller, weaker ones. Such secular instruments... like the religious one here... would remind the weaker bodies of the care given by the greater one; prohibit outside allegiances; and provide for a written agreement. Basically, to remind that smaller entity of both the **benefit...** and **cost...** of their relationship with the greater one. Just what Joshua was challenging his brethren to recall.

The **benefit**, as laid out by Joshua in the previous verses, was simple: God saving His children from death, either at the hands of their enemies, or from lack of food or water. A

people saved by trusting in God, no matter what. It was THIS 'trustworthy' God that Joshua declared before his fellow Israelites that 'he and his house would serve.'

To bring this 'household of faith' into a bit more 'modern' context, we read in *Acts* of a non-believer 'prison guard' who was struck by the faith of another powerful leader of God's Church, Paul... and his buddy Silas. When he witnessed God's power in opening wide the prison cell, the jailer fell down before the two of them and asked **"What must I do to be saved?"** To which Paul replied, **"Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household."** (16:31) And after preaching the Word to them all, the Jailer and his family all received Christ into their hearts, and were baptized. **"And he rejoiced along with his entire household that he had believed in God."** (Acts 16:34)

Just as it was for those ancient God-followers, it is true for us: the 'benefit' of trusting in God... be He called 'YHWH' or 'Yeshua' ('Jesus')... is the same – **to be saved from death.** Just as Joshua did with his 'house'... and that Jailer did with his... we too are to 'rejoice along with our entire household that we believe in God.' AND, that 'we WILL serve the Lord.'

As opposed to the 'benefit,' the 'cost' of 'followship,' according to Joshua, is to **"revere the Lord, and serve him in sincerity and in faithfulness."** (Joshua 24:14) For that word 'revere'... no, NOT the Revolutionary War figure or 60's rock band☺... many translations use the word **"FEAR."** Not a word that we really LIKE to hear... *especially* for that loving God that sent Jesus to die for our sin... so that we might NOT 'fear' death. And yet, that word 'fear' is used some **300 times** in the Scriptures in connection with God. So, it is a concept that we should NOT take lightly...

That word 'fear' is certainly synonymous with 'reverence' and 'awe.' But I believe that it can also refer to a **healthy respect** for the **power of God**... particularly with regards to His **judgment.** That **authority** that we sang of in our opening hymn... when **'Jesus the Judge shall come and take His servants up.'** The kind of 'fear' that would cause us to find **sobering** the parable of Jesus that we read of in *Matthew*. Where foolish 'attendants' to the bridegroom neglected to be ready for his arrival, and when they cried out **"Lord, lord, open to us,"** the bridegroom replied, **"Truly I tell you, I do not know you."** (Mt. 25:11-12) The 'bridegroom' in

that parable IS 'Christ.' The Christ who warns His disciples, ***"Keep awake therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour."*** (Matthew 25:13)

We, today's 'disciples' of Jesus, should also heed His warning to 'keep awake.' For, unless someone here has some gifts of prophecy I don't know about, we TOO ***"know neither the day nor the hour."*** And I don't think that ANYONE here would want to hear our dear Lord say to one of us, ***"Truly I tell you, I don't know you"...***

Soooo.... Is everyone here pretty pumped up now?! What do WE, who can certainly fall short in how we, and our households, ***"serve the Lord"...*** What can WE, whose 'lamp oil' can certainly run dry, as we can become 'drowsy and sleep' as we wait on the 'delayed bridegroom'... learn from these ancient 'words of warning?' After Joshua's somewhat cynical words to his countrymen... and Jesus' words about 'foolishness' to His followers... where is the HOPE?

Wait... Paul to the rescue! What? Paul? That proud, bigoted Pharisee, who ravaged the church and dragged men and women to prison? The one who said that ***"I am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God."***(1 Corinthians 15:9) The same Paul who, near the end of his life, considered himself to be ***'the worst of sinners?'***

YES, this great evangelist who epitomized both strength and humility in service to our Lord, offers us... who might not consider ourselves to be the 'worst of sinners,' but dang sure fall short of Paul... these words of encouragement:

"Since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God WILL bring with him those who have died."

SURE, we need to bear in mind Joshua's admonition to not serve the gods of this world; that we must be ever vigilant that 'as for us, and our house, we serve the Lord.' OF COURSE, we must never get complacent about the Lord's return, which could happen AT THIS VERY MOMENT. Ever mindful of Jesus' place as both Savior AND Judge, we MUST continue to keep our 'lamp lights' burning with the 'oil' of God's Holy Spirit; that rather than living in fear that Jesus would say, ***"I do not know you,"*** instead, we are ready to ***"come out and meet him."***

But the bottom line is who ALONE do we trust in for our salvation? To employ a little 'Reformation humor,' we are to be a part of the 'solasystem': That by "*sola scriptura*"... through the **Scriptures** alone... we can know that it is "*sola fide*"... by "**faith** alone"... in "*solus Christus*"... in "**Christ** alone"... and by "*sola gratia*"... by God's "**grace** alone"... that you and I can live "*solus Deo Gloria*"... for the "**glory of God** alone." That there is absolutely NOTHING we can do to save ourselves from the 'grip' of death except the 'hand' of God ALONE... by the 'nail-scarred hands' of Jesus... ALONE. That, in Paul's words, if "***we believe that Jesus died and rose again... God will bring with him those who died.***" Or, in Jesus own words, "***I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father but by me.***" (John 14:6)

As you and I continue to seek to '**walk** in His **way**'... '**talk** with His **truth**'... and '**live** by His **life**'... may we accept the fact that we will, at various times, fail our Savior. Stumble in the darkness. We simply need to keep on living... talking... walking. Walking to His light. As our Lord reminds us, "***I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.***" (John 8:12) The Light that brings us home. Simply LISTEN for the voice of our Triune God...Father, Son, and Holy Spirit...which say to us: "**We'll leave the 'Light' on for you!**"