

## This Week's Theme: The Life of Service

**This Week's Memory Verse:** *Then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve . . . But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord.*  
Joshua 24:15

### Monday, May 26

#### Scripture Reading: Joshua 24

This text takes place at the end of Joshua's life. He is challenging the children of Israel and reminds them that they have a choice. They can choose to serve the Lord, or they can choose to serve other gods. The same is true for us. We have a choice who we will serve and worship. We can serve the gods and idols of this world, we can choose to live a self-serving life, or we can choose to serve the Lord. And for us, it is a daily choice: who will I serve this day, this morning, this hour. This week we will look at how serving the Lord (yielding to Him and living life His way) can impact the life we live with and for God. But the starting place is to remember we will serve somebody or something, and to live a life serving the Lord we must **choose** to serve the Lord.

Bob Dylan captures the thought well:

You may be a state trooper, you might be a young Turk,  
You may be the head of some big TV network,  
You may be rich or poor, you may be blind or lame,  
You may be living in another country under another name

You may be a construction worker working on a home,  
You may be living in a mansion or you might live in a dome,  
You might own guns and you might even own tanks,  
You might be somebody's landlord, you might even own banks

You may be a preacher with your spiritual pride,  
You may be a city councilman taking bribes on the side,  
You may be workin' in a barbershop, you may know how to cut hair,  
You may be somebody's mistress, may be somebody's heir

But you're gonna have to serve somebody, yes indeed  
You're gonna have to serve somebody,  
Well, it may be the devil or it may be the Lord  
But you're gonna have to serve somebody.

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### **Tuesday, May 27**

#### **Scripture Reading: 1 Samuel 12**

Samuel, the great prophet of God to the Israelites, had warned the people of the dangers of having a king. But they wanted one so they could be like everyone else. Isn't it interesting how this root of sin, the need to be like others, has been with us for so long?

Here in chapter 12 Samuel is offering his farewell as the leader of the people after Saul was confirmed as king in chapter 11. Samuel comes down pretty hard on the people. He reminds them that their desire for a king was in rebellion to God's plans: *And you will realize what an evil thing you did in the eyes of the Lord when you asked for a king.*

Luckily for the Israelites (and us) Samuel didn't stop there. In verses 20-24 he lets them know their sin doesn't discount them from life with God: *yet do not turn away from the Lord, but serve the Lord with all your heart.* He is calling the people back to God – to repentance – and the means of that coming back to God is service. It's a great thought, isn't it? How do I repent? What is the evidence that I have repented? For Samuel, repentance is both executed and demonstrated through repentance. *But be sure to fear the Lord and serve him faithfully with all your heart; consider what great things he has done for you.*

That kind of goes against the grain of what we usually think. We usually think our sin disqualifies us from serving God. But Samuel suggests our serving God is the most productive response to our sin. The life of service is more than a life of holiness. It is also a life lived in repentance to God; a life lived in fear and awe of God; a life lived in gratitude to God.

Isn't it interesting how often we think the very thing our sin cuts off from us is the very thing we need the most to combat our sin. We feel like we can't pray after we've sinned, or go to church, or be with Christian friends, or serve God or others in His name, all because of our sin. Well, guess what? God has to use and listen to and love sinful people: He has no choice – it's all He has to work with! And it is in the praying and fellowship with God's people and serving in God's name that we find the restoration we so desperately need.

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### **Wednesday, May 28**

#### **Scripture Reading: 1 Samuel 16:14-23**

So, being king wasn't all it is cracked up to be. Saul finds himself in a difficult circumstance. He sins against God in chapter 15, literally putting himself in the place of the priest and prophet. In our day and time, it would be considered along the lines of doing the work of the Holy Spirit in place of the Holy Spirit. As you might imagine, this didn't sit well with God, so God looks for a new king in chapter 16 and settles on David, a young boy who will grow into the job. The text for today shows us that Saul's rejecting God has led to some torment in his own life. The infirmity described sounds like a migraine that never ends. He can find no peace at all.

None, that is, until David comes to the palace. Saul is very taken with David as a person, but probably more so for the soothing relief David brought to his life. When David would serve Saul by playing his harp, Saul's torment and pain would leave. Peace came to Saul through the service of David.

Service and peace often go together. Usually it is the service of one that brings peace to another, like here in the text. You bring peace to someone by meeting a need in their life; you take away their anxiety and torment through the ministry you perform. Or perhaps someone brings peace to you by serving and ministering to you. And the peace comes in all shapes and sizes. Just the other day I was dreading having to cut my long overdue yard: weeds were high, threatening letters from the community association were piling up, and several small dogs had been lost in my grass. As I pulled into the driveway I found a few friends cutting my lawn. What a blessing that was, and what a sense of peace came over me knowing someone else did for me what I was dreading most.

Our service brings peace to others, and it brings peace to our own lives as we serve. When we serve, we know we are pleasing God and doing what is most important in His Kingdom (Matthew 20:20-28). There is no greater peace than knowing you are in the will of God and doing what He would do if He were here. When we serve in Jesus name, we have that knowledge that brings His peace.

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### **Thursday, May 29**

#### **Scripture Reading: Galatians 5:13-26**

We've looked quite a bit at the life of service this week. We've seen how this life is a life we choose: it is not thrust upon us. We've seen how service is a means of repentance, and how service brings peace both to those we serve and to our own lives. One question that is often asked with regard to service is, "What do I do? Can you give me a list – what counts as service in God's Kingdom?"

It's interesting because the list we often find in Scripture is not what to do, but rather how to do it. The clear priority for God is how we serve; the spirit in which we serve is most important. Today's text reminds us of that. Verse 13 says we are to serve each other in love. The fruit of the Spirit in verses 22-23 spells it out even more. The passage leaves us with the distinct impression that anything done in this spirit is done for the Lord; it "counts" as Kingdom service.

B.B. McKinney wrote a classic Baptist hymn in 1931 that sums it up best:

*"Serve the Lord with gladness" in our works and ways  
Come before His presence with our songs of praise  
Unto Him our Maker we would pledge anew  
Life's supreme devotion and service true*

*"Serve the Lord with gladness" thankful all the while  
For his tender mercies, for His loving smile  
Blessed truth enduring, always just the same  
We will serve with gladness and praise His name*

*"Serve the Lord with gladness," this shall be our theme  
As we walk together in His love supreme  
Listening ever listening for the still small voice  
His sweet will so precious will be our choice*

*"Serve Him with gladness, enter His courts with song  
To our Creator true praises belong  
Great is His mercy, wonderful is His name  
We gladly serve Him, His great love proclaim*

c.1931; renewal 1959 by Broadman Press (SESAC)

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### **Friday, May 30**

#### **Scripture Reading: 1 Peter 4:1-11**

1 Peter is a letter about holy living written to persecuted Christians scattered throughout Asia Minor during the first century. Peter spends most of the letter trying to accomplish two purposes: (1) he wants to encourage these suffering believers, and at the same time, (2) he wants to challenge them to holy living in the midst of these circumstances.

And what a challenge it was. Just look at some of the things Peter mentions in these verses as he describes what holy living might look like for his audience. He says they are to be clear minded and self controlled (v.7), a hard thing to do when you live with the anxiety they surely must have lived each day with. Within the church they are told to love each other deeply (v.8), not superficially or deceptively, the way many of us sometimes do. Peter said to offer hospitality without grumbling (v.9). Doesn't that take all the fun out of it – griping about everyone after they are gone? They were to use their gifts faithfully, be vessels of grace, and speak to one another with the very words God would speak (vs.10-11). Has Peter ever been to church? Does he realize what he is asking?

Actually, I think Peter knew exactly what he was asking, and he knew how difficult it would be. In other words, Peter was asking them to step up to a God-sized task; to do something that could only be done in the power of God's Spirit. That's the thing about holy living – its source must be holy. And that means its source must come from someone other than me or anyone/anything in this world. Holy living can only come from the Holy One.

Peter makes this point clear about the way we serve others in v.11: when we serve we do so with the strength that God provides. Why? One reason, as stated above, is that it is the only way possible to serve in this way – through God's strength. But the other reason Peter spells out is that if we serve in God's strength it is God who is praised. What other's notice is that what we've done has been done as an act of God's strength and love. So, after the service is done, the people served are talking about God and giving Him the glory. And when God gets the glory for something I have done, that, my friends, is holy living.

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### **Saturday, May 31**

#### **Scripture Reading: Romans 12**

In Romans 12, Paul comes to a transition in this magnificent book of Scripture. In chapters 1-11 he offered up his theology, and at the beginning of chapter 12 he shifts his focus to more practical matters. The idea is something like, "Because we believe these things to be true, our lives should reflect that belief by looking something like this."

Paul begins this new section by calling for us to offer our lives to God as living sacrifices, not living in conformity to the world but rather living transformed lives that accomplish the good, pleasing, and perfect will of God. We are to live humble, sober lives, using the gifts God has given us so His body might fulfill its purpose on this earth.

Verse 9 begins the next thought – that we are to live these transformed lives and exercise these gifts in love. Paul then goes on to describe what sincere love looks like. He gives a beautiful, challenging description in vs.9-21. What is interesting is that all of these descriptions relate back to how we serve one another. Our love is shown in service. That means service is how we demonstrate the love of God. And that means service is a wonderful tool for witnessing and testifying about the love of God. Acts of kindness and sacrifice are never forgotten and get people's attention.

*Sacrifices move people. They melt people. They stop people in their tracks and make them ask, "Why? Why would you go out of your way for me? What would motivate you to put your interests ahead of my own? Sacrifices impact people for a lifetime.\**

*Preach the Gospel at all times and when necessary use words.*  
*St. Francis of Assisi*

\*Bill Hybels and Mark Mittelberg, *Becoming a Contagious Christian*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1994), 81-82.

## **Sunday, June 1**

*Large crowds were traveling with Jesus, and turning to them he said: "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters—yes, even his own life—he cannot be my disciple. And anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.*

*"Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Will he not first sit down and estimate the cost to see if he has enough money to complete it? For if he lays the foundation and is not able to finish it, everyone who sees it will ridicule him, saying, 'This fellow began to build and was not able to finish.'*

*"Or suppose a king is about to go to war against another king. Will he not first sit down and consider whether he is able with ten thousand men to oppose the one coming against him with twenty thousand? If he is not able, he will send a delegation while the other is still a long way off and will ask for terms of peace. In the same way, any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple.*

*Luke 14:25-33*