

“EVEN A CUP OF COLD WATER”
Psalm 9:1-10, Romans 6:12-23, Matthew 10:40-42
June 28, 2020

Throughout this month I have been challenging you to put feet on your faith and begin loving those around you in such a way that they see your love and experience Jesus Christ in them. I talked last week about Jesus’ call for us to live with boldness, so that we need not be afraid to live for Him, even though hardships and persecutions will come. Yes, it is a challenge to live for Jesus today, but the benefits are so great. I invite you, today, to live in such a way that you will be a blessing to others.

In order to become a blessing to others, we first need to see how blessed we are by the Lord our God. **We have been tremendously blessed by God** and we see that in Psalm 9:1-10. If we have eyes to see and ears to hear, we will be able to look around us and see the abundance of God’s blessings poured out into our lives. The homes we have, the food we enjoy, the health we often take for granted, the conveniences we enjoy, the education we have received, the jobs we have, the relationships we have developed, and the beauty of nature all around us are just a few of the thousands of blessings we have received from God just today. If you were to take some time to start writing down all of your blessings, it would take you the rest of today and even into this next week to get to just the tip of the blessing iceberg. We are tremendously blessed!

So it is right that we echo David’s words of Psalm 9:1, “***I will praise you, Lord, with all my heart; I will tell of all the wonderful things You have done.***” God has blessed us so abundantly and it is right that we turn around and return great praise to Him for all that He has done for us.

And it is right that we also share in verse 2, where David says “***I will sing with joy because of You. I will sing praise to You, Almighty God.***” Because of all that the Lord has given to us, our hearts should be overflowing with joy and praise. God is gracious and generous to those who love Him and choose to follow His ways. He is ready to pour out even more abundant blessings to us as we live for Him and use our blessings to touch the lives of those around us so that they, too, might come to the Lord and experience His outpouring of blessings to them. As we become aware of all of the blessings that we

have and how rich we are in the Lord, our lives can become so full of joy that we sing to the Lord every day. And as we sing to the Lord with joy, people around us notice it, and that joy will become contagious, even more than a corona virus, influencing the lives of the people around us.

And then we have the opportunity to tell others how much “*the Lord is a refuge for the oppressed, a place of safety in times of trouble*” (Ps. 9:9). Every one of us who has turned to the Lord for help and have relied upon His power and authority know the tremendous security that we have in the Lord our God. He is our “*strong tower* (Prov. 18:10), *the rock and fortress*” (2 Samuel 22:2) upon whom we build our lives.

So if God blesses us when we turn to Him and follow Him, if He is our shelter and shield from the wickedness of the world, if He abundantly blesses those who seek Him and claim Him as their Lord, **Why should we live against Him** and rebel against His will and His ways?

The Apostle Paul explains this very clearly to us in Romans 6:12-23. He explains that we are in a battle, the battle of good against evil; of righteousness against unrighteousness; of the ways of the world against the ways of God. Being human, we are totally immersed in sin because of the world that we live in. And though God has provided us a way to become freed from the sinfulness of the world, the battle rages on within us as to which way we will turn. The things of this world are so attractive and alluring, but they have no lasting value. The things of the Lord are eternal and go even beyond this life.

So Paul invites us to **give ourselves to God** so that we may be blessed by Him, and then find eternal life beyond this life with Him (Rom. 6:13). God has bought us from sin and death through the work that Jesus accomplished on the cross. His death and resurrection frees us from eternal death as we put our trust in Him and follow Him. And Paul invites us to “*surrender [our] whole being to Him to be used for righteous purposes.*”

As we surrender our whole being to Him, we turn from the things of the world and acknowledge the things of God and dedicate our lives to serving Him. We submit to all the teachings of the Bible and we dedicate ourselves as servants of the Lord. Then it no longer becomes about our own wants and

wishes, but the wants and wishes of the Lord guiding our lives. We become His servants. Then as we submit to the Lord Jesus, we can be used for righteous purposes that continue to touch and bless those around us as we invite them to put their faith and trust in the Lord Jesus, too.

So Paul reminds us that when you trusted in Jesus, “*you were set free from sin and became the slaves of righteousness*” (Rom. 6:18). That means that sin is no longer to have its way with in you. You have made your choice to follow Jesus, so there is to be nothing that will turn you back to the old ways of sin. In fact, when we turn to humble ourselves to Jesus, we are no longer our own, but we belong to God (Rom. 9:19).

It’s like a woman I know who recently changed jobs. She submitted her resignation to the one job, with all its guidelines and regulations and benefits and opportunities, and she humbled herself to the new job with all its challenges, guidelines, regulations, benefits and opportunities. She is no longer the employee of the first company; she has given herself to become a faithful servant in the new company. She now gives all of her time and energy and loyalty to the new position at the new company, for she has relinquished her position and title and authority in the old company. So when she visits the old company, she is no longer an employee there, but now just a patron to that company. Her full loyalty as a servant is invested into the new company. The old company no longer has authority over her.

So we are to be the same way with the ways of the world and the ways of God. We are to relinquish any position or power or authority or opportunity we might have in the things of this world, and we are to fully embrace the new position and power and authority and opportunity we have as we give our whole selves to the things of God. The ways of the world no longer having any authority over us, we are to completely submit ourselves to the things of the Lord God, and only follow His ways. And when we do that, we are now God’s servant, living for His holy purposes (Rom. 6:19).

And **what are the results** that we can expect? Well, if we continue to live according to the ways of the world, we belong to sin, and obey its authority over us. And Paul tells us what the wages of sin bring us to – death (Rom. 6:23). Living according to the ways of the world, outside of the ways of God,

rejecting the promises and possibilities and blessings of the Lord God, there is only one thing we can expect – eternal separation from God. The Bible tells us that eternal separation from God is what hell is all about. We choose our own path away from God’s guidelines, and we suffer the consequences of going our own way. We are allowed to live eternally in God’s absence, in a world of our own making with no love, no hope, no joy, no rescue - nothing except eternal punishment of our own making.

One of the greatest lies of Satan is that everyone goes to heaven, no matter how good or bad they were. Satan tries to convince us that this life has no determinations for the life of our souls after this physical life is over, so he tells us to live it up here while we can, because there’s nothing beyond this life. We see that lie all around is in advertisements. And if there’s nothing beyond this life to live for, then we do what we want, when we want it, to whomever we want, while we’re here, and we convince ourselves that the one with the most toys wins! There’s no hope in that mindset! It all ends in death.

But the greatest promise that God has given to us is that when we put our trust in Him, when we live according to His ways and serve Him in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior, we have a joyful life for us here and we will be with Him beyond this life to live in eternal life.

Paul states it well, *“For sin pays its wage – death; but God’s free gift is eternal life in union with Christ Jesus our Lord”* (Rom. 6:23). God’s free gift ready to be given to us as we trust Jesus as our Lord and Savior, is eternal life. So the wages of righteousness and faith in Jesus is life!

Death – Life – Which one do you want? We’d be fools to choose death, but that’s exactly what we choose when we decide to turn away from God’s ways and follow the ways of the world. We choose death when we reject Jesus Christ and His ways. So Paul tells us, *“But now you have been set free from sin and are the slaves of God. Your gain is a life fully dedicated to Him, and the result is eternal life”* (Rom. 6:22). As we claim Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior we are to dedicate ourselves into the service of God for the purpose of holiness and godly living.

And that leads us to the Gospel lesson of Matthew 10:40-42. I invite you to hear Jesus’ words of what our reward of faithful living is for us. Listen to Jesus’ words. (READ Matthew 10:40-42)

As we recognize that we need Jesus to be our Savior to save us from sin, which leads to eternal death, we come to one of the hardest parts of being a Christian – **Living With Jesus Inside of Us Each Day**. As we allow Jesus to become the Savior of our life, He invites us to let Him become the Lord of our life, too. That means that we completely submit our whole selves to His teachings and His commands. In everything we do and say, we begin to reflect the teachings and commands of Jesus in our lives so that people can see the difference it makes to have Jesus as the Lord of our life.

As we talked about last week, when we let Jesus become Lord of our life, people will recognize the difference in us, and it will create a division between us and them, based upon what they have done with Jesus. If those around us have not yet come to the point in their life where they see the need for Jesus to completely guide them as Savior and Lord, they will be following the ways of the world, and that will create problems, because the ways of Jesus and the ways of the world do not work together at all. So because we believe and follow Jesus, and they do not, we will be seen as “the enemy” and will be persecuted and oppressed because of our faith in Jesus.

But Jesus encourages us not to be afraid to live like Him so that in all we do and say, we are following Him. As we do that we will be known as Christians based upon our association with Jesus and His teachings (Matt. 10:40). Knowing that we live in a world of people who will not recognize Him as the Messiah, Jesus informs us that we will have two possible receptions awaiting us – one of rejection and ridicule, or one of welcome and acceptance. Having warned us of the rejection that will come, Jesus now tells us about the welcoming end of the reception.

Jesus tells us that blessings will come to those who welcome us as His followers. The blessings come as they receive us, because they not only receive us, but they receive Jesus, too. AND they also receive God the Father, who sent Jesus, who sends us. As they receive us, they are showing that they are welcome to having Jesus there in their presence. They are not repulsed by us who proclaim Jesus, nor do they reject us because of our following Jesus. As they receive us and welcome us, they receive a blessing because they are now in the presence of the Lord Jesus and the Father Almighty. They, then,

by welcoming us, are associating themselves with Jesus, by hosting us. And then the blessings begin to flow upon them, because they have welcomed Jesus.

It would be like us, as Fountain Park United Methodist Church, hosting a political candidate to give an address to the people of Sheboygan. No matter which candidate we host, we would immediately be associated this church with that candidate, with the party that they represent, and with the thoughts and proposals of that individual. Everyone in Sheboygan would then look at us as sympathetic to that political candidate, and we would be labeled according to that person's particular persuasion. And of course, we would receive the reward of that particular person's reception to Sheboygan. If the city appreciated the intentions of that candidate, then we would receive accolades for bringing in that candidate. But if the city did not agree with that candidate, then we would receive the scorn or abuse that would be put toward that candidate.

Jesus tells us that by receiving a prophet, we receive a prophet's reward (good or bad). If we receive the good man, we then receive the good man's reward. It is all by association with that particular person and by who they are proclaiming, and how they are received by those around us. When we are received by people who know that we are followers of Jesus Christ, they receive the reward that we receive.

And it doesn't have to be a great big deal. Jesus tells us that "...*whoever gives even a drink of cold water to one of the least of these my followers because he is my follower, will certainly receive a reward*" (Matt. 10:42). No big deal, right, just a cup of cold water. But if it is given to a person who is a follower of Jesus, JUST BECAUSE they are a follower of Jesus, it becomes a big deal to the Lord our God because that person giving the water now associates themselves with Jesus by touching the life of the follower of Jesus. It is the giving of yourself for the sake of another person who follows Jesus.

Let me explain it this way. "Jeff Leeland had just accepted a teaching position at Kamiakin Junior High School in Seattle, Washington. The family had endured months of Jeff's driving to and from work before the family could relocate from their previous home.

“As winter struggled toward spring in 1992, Jeff and Kristi heard the devastating news: ‘Your baby boy has cancer. Michael needs a bone-marrow transplant.’ The good news was that Michael's six-year-old sister, Amy, was a perfect match for the transplant. But Jeff's insurance company wouldn't pay for it. A tiny clause in the contract coldly stated that Jeff had to be on the job for at least a year before they would cover a transplant. He had been teaching in the new job for only six months.

“By March, Michael's need for a transplant became urgent. If he couldn't receive the new bone marrow soon, his illness would progress quickly, and he would die. The Leelands needed to raise an impossible sum of \$200,000 by May.

“Fellow teacher Joe Kennedy told his class about Mr. Leeland's situation. Dameon, a seventh-grade boy who walked with a limp and struggled in special education classes, heard about Mr. Leeland's son, Michael, and made a visit to Jeff's house.

“Mr. Leeland, don't make a big deal out of this . . . if your baby's in trouble, I want to help out.’ Dameon, the kid others teased, reached out his hand and stuffed 12 five-dollar bills into the hand of a teacher who had made a difference in his life. It was the boy's life savings.

“Word got out about ‘Dameon's gift.’ Some kids organized a walk-a-thon. Others contacted a local newspaper. Others held a car wash. ‘Teenagers,’ Jeff says, ‘are pre-adults in limbo-land, waiting around for something important to do.’ Michael became that important thing.

“The Kamiakin kids' wave of compassion poured out across Seattle. One week after Dameon's gift, Michael's fund grew to \$16,000. On Friday, May 22, a man walked into the bank with a check for ten thousand dollars. By late May, area TV stations picked up the story. The response from the news stories was overwhelming. By May 29, Michael's fund grew to \$62,000. The Leelands were boosted with hope when the hospital moved Michael's transplant back by two weeks.

“On Friday, June 5, the fund had grown to \$143,000. Monday, June 8: \$160,000. Tuesday, June 9: \$185,000. When a TV news broadcast pronounced victory for Michael, the Kamiakin Junior High kids went crazy with happiness. Only four weeks after Dameon's gift of \$60, the Michael Leeland Fund

totaled over \$220,000.

“Michael got the marrow transplant. He lived. Dameon, the boy who gave sacrificially so another could live, accepted Jesus Christ as his Savior after becoming close with Michael's family. Having struggled for years with physical problems of his own, Dameon died from complications after he got an infection in one of his legs.

“Michael Leeland lives to tell Dameon's story. Dameon, the unlikely hero, gave his all to save the life of another. And in the process, he received life everlasting.”¹

A cup of cold water given in love to a teacher who had made a difference in the life of a student. And that student received eternal life as he shared in the reward of giving to one of the least of these in the kingdom of God.

Folks, I cannot tell you the importance of passing on the blessing of eternal life to those around you. As you live a **transformed** life of a disciple of Jesus Christ, you proclaim Jesus wherever you go. And believe it or not, the world is watching to see how you live as that disciple of Jesus. And if you live in the integrity of Jesus' teachings and commands, you will enable them to see the dramatic difference that Jesus makes as you profess Him before the whole world. And, then as they seek Jesus as their own Savior, and receive Him as their Lord, they receive the reward that is yours as a faithful disciple of Jesus.

But, if you proclaim to have Jesus as your Lord and Savior, but live a life completely contrary to the teachings and commands of Jesus, not only are you rejecting Jesus and all of His ways, but you are propagating a lie that others will possibly claim as their own, and they will receive your reward of rejecting Jesus.

So live boldly for Jesus so that even a cup of cold water might bring great blessings to others as they share in your eternal life with Jesus. AMEN

¹ Adapted from Jeff Leeland, *One Small Sparrow* (Multnomah, 2000) and from a phone interview with Jeff Leeland; Sisters, Oregon; found in *More Perfect Illustrations*, [Nashville; Tyndale House, 2003] pg. 28-30