

“HOW FAR WILL YOU GO FOR JESUS?”
Psalm 113, Romans 5:1-8, Matthew 9:35-38
June 13 & 14, 2020

Last week we finished up the series, “Are You the Christ” with the message on Who Is My Neighbor. This question put before Jesus challenges us to look beyond ourselves and what we can do to “earn” eternal life, to what we can do for those around us who are in need, or call for us to show unconditional love to them. Even if the enemy stands before us with a need that we can meet, Jesus invites us to look at them, not as the enemy, but as a fellow human being.

We saw in that question, that the Scriptures invite us to “*Love the Lord our God with all our heart, with all our soul, with all our strength, and with all our mind*” (Luke 10:27a). That means that we are to let the Lord our God be the most important One in our life. Only He is to have that #1 place within us. And that means that we **focus on Him with our whole heart** (that is with all our yearnings and desires), **we seek Him with all our soul** (meaning with all our ambitions and life-goals), **we follow Him with all our strength** (doing that in whatever we do for work or recreation), and we **concentrate on Him with all of our mind** (as we let Him guide our thoughts and intentions). Our whole lives are to be centered on God being right there in the middle of all that we are as a person. We humble ourselves completely to His will and His way in our lives – no selfish desires or ambitions. We turn our whole selves completely over to His command. That’s step #1 in gaining eternal life.

And then we recognized the second part to the answer given to Jesus, “*Love your neighbor as you love yourself*” (Luke 10:27b). We are to **love our neighbor (our fellow human being) with as much love as we have for ourselves**. And that is the hard part, because to do this we first have to love ourselves. When we find it hard to love ourselves because of ridicule or bullying or abuse that we’ve had in our own lives, it is hard to love another. These things tend to destroy any self-image within us and we see ourselves as being unlovable, even by our own self. And we usually treat others the way that we have been treated. Those who are bullied are usually bullies. Those who are abused are usually abusers. Those who are ridiculed usually ridicule. It doesn’t come out very nice, because we haven’t

been treated very nicely. So when life has handed us a bowl of cherries, it's hard to enjoy them because of all of the pits we find ourselves chomping on.

But once we discover how much God loves us and find our own love for God, it is easier to begin to love others. In His love, God calls us to treat those around us with respect and dignity, even if they are not like us, even if they have different viewpoints, even if they value life differently, and even if they treat us poorly. We are to demonstrate the love of God to others as God first loved us. But the question for us today is, "**How Far Will You Go For Jesus**" to love your neighbor as yourself?

You see, this demands that we look beyond ourselves to begin to really see those around us. If we are to love our neighbor as our self, it means that we must first realize that the life given to us is not to be all about us, but about us becoming the servants of others. And to do that we are to look out to the people of the world. When we look beyond ourselves who do we see? Are we able to see the poor, the needy, and the childless wife as Psalm 113 lifts up? Or is it just people like us? Do we see the troubled, or the wicked, or the lost, or the sinner as we hear in Romans 5? Or are they quickly dismissed as not being our neighbor so that we can overlook them and pass them off as unworthy of our love and respect? (Romans 5:1-8) And that's where we see Jesus calling us to take the love of God deeper into our lives. Rather than just saying we love God, we are to turn that love for God into love for others.

We read today in our Scripture lessons how **God has loved all people**. Throughout the Psalms we read of God's great love for us. As His creation, God is Lord of all things. And Psalm 113:5-6 tell us plainly that "*there is no one like the Lord our God. He lives in the heights above, but He bends down to see the heavens and the earth.*" Though He is over all and above all, God chooses to associate with us so that we can learn about Him and grow close to Him and follow His ways. God did not just create the heavens and the earth and then go His merry way to leave us to ourselves. God invests Himself in each of our lives, providing for us, caring for us and giving guidance for us to live abundant lives. However, the choice is ours as to whether we will listen to Him and follow Him. God has given us free will to either follow Him or go our own way. And I hope it is not too hard for us to see what life would

be like when we go our own way. It shouldn't take us too long to see how the world looks since we do not all follow His will and His way. Watch the news one night and it will give you a good picture of how messed up the world becomes when we go our own way rather than His way.

But **God bends down to the earth** because He cares for us. Out of all the planets in all of the solar systems, God looks down at us and sees our needs and calls out to us to follow Him. In all of the heavens, God's eyes are on this little planet we call Earth, and He tenderly watches over us to meet our needs. From the vastness of the universe, God has chosen us to favor with His presence and His love.

He even **sent His own Son, Jesus**, to come be here with us, **to bring us His peace** (Rom. 5:1). Where on else today can we find real peace? Only in Jesus do we find true and lasting peace for ourselves and for all those who trust in Him and follow His ways. Through all the turmoil that is happening in our world, our only hope to find peace is through Jesus Christ.

You see, God looked down from above, He bent down to see us, and He realized that we were helpless without Him (Rom. 5:6). He knew that we were unable to do anything on our own to find real life, or peace, or hope, so God supplied us an answer for that helpless condition. Jesus Christ died for all of us to pay the price for the sinfulness in our lives that separated us from God. Jesus died for ALL of us, so anyone who calls out to Him and asks Him to be their Savior to forgive them and make them a new creature through Him have that new life as a promise from God. *“God demonstrated His great love for us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us!”* (Rom. 5:8). It's nothing that we can do to earn that salvation. It is a free gift to all those who will recognize Jesus as the Messiah and turn to Him, seeking the forgiveness that only He provides. I can't pay for it! I can't work for it! I can't do anything to earn it except humble myself and claim what Jesus has already done to provide it for me. It's a free gift from God, so that none of us can boast about how we did something to earn it.

Once we receive Jesus as our Savior, we need to ask an important question, “Now that we have Jesus, **Now What Do We Do?**” And this is the turning point in our lives. We begin to see as God sees. We begin to look out at the world as Jesus looked at the world. We open our eyes to look around us and

see the great harvest around us that are yet to find God's saving grace through Jesus. Listen to how Jesus calls us to look at the world. This is Matthew 9:35-38. (READ Matthew 9:35-38)

When God the Son, Jesus, looked at the world, He discovered a harvest that was all set for gathering. He looked out at all the people around Him, and **Jesus had compassion on them**. He didn't see their need and say to Himself, "Oh, what a shame! Oh, I feel so bad about the hurting people! Oh I wish I could do something about all of them!" No, Jesus saw the crowds, He noticed the worried and the helpless people and He stepped up and brought healing to them and cured their diseases and sicknesses. He taught them the ways of God, and told them about the Kingdom of His Father and He called them to believe in Him and find eternal life through Him. He didn't just see it and then stand there and not do anything! Jesus used the power that He had to make a difference in the lives of those around Him.

Jesus noticed that the people were "like sheep without a shepherd" (Matt. 9:36). Do you know what sheep are like without a shepherd? They're all over the place, wandering until they get lost, until they get isolated and abandoned, and they get surrounded by predators, and they become lunch or supper. Sheep without a shepherd don't last very long because they have no way to protect themselves. Their only focus is on feeding their faces, so they nibble here and there and reach out for this tiny morsel, and they never look up to see the danger they are in until it is too late, AND THEY DIE.

And Matthew says that Jesus looked out at the crowds and saw them as sheep without a shepherd. The people were just as helpless as the sheep! And it at this point that Jesus turns to His disciples and says, "*The harvest is large, but there are few workers to gather it in. Pray to the owner of the harvest that He will send out workers to gather in His harvest*" (Matt. 9:37-38).

Jesus sees that we all struggle with trials and hardships. We all have to endure the hardships of life, especially when we do not follow the Lord. When we are all on our own, we become the sheep without a shepherd, and we, like them, find ourselves looking out only for our own wants and wishes and we do this and that to satisfy our own desires until we find ourselves in trouble, and often it's too

late. When we do not have anyone to guide us and protect us, we become vulnerable to the “predators” of our own day who are ready to lead us to destruction. They may make great promises, but their only intention is in their own wants and wishes, and they take advantage of everyone else to get what they want. Then it is the ones with the most power and the most resources that win over the weak and helpless.

But Jesus **Taught the Good News About The Kingdom Of God** (9:35). He told us how we could find the gate of the sheepfold where we could find safety and security, where we could find peace and rest. Jesus told us that He would become our Shepherd who would protect us and guide us to the green pastures and the still waters. Jesus told us that He was the Good Shepherd who lays down His life for the sheep (John 10:11), and that if anyone comes to Him, he would find rest (Matthew 11:29).

Jesus explained how to turn the struggles of life into hope by following His commands. As the Apostle Paul explains it, we can “...*boast of our troubles, because we know that trouble produces endurance, endurance brings God’s approval, and His approval creates hope. This hope does not disappoint us, for God has poured out His love into our hearts by means of the Holy Spirit, who is God’s gift to us*” (Romans 5:3-5). That hope comes as we put our trust and faith in Jesus Christ as our Good Shepherd. And Jesus proved that He is the Good Shepherd who protects and cares for His sheep by healing the diseases and sicknesses of the people (Matt. 9:35). It wasn’t just for the people of that time, but it is for us, too, as we humble ourselves before Him and allow Him to heal us and give us new life. Through the work of the Holy Spirit, we, too, can find our lives freed up from the ravages of the predators of today that cause disease and sickness. But it demands that we follow the Good Shepherd.

So as we come to recognize our own needs and we have come to the One who gives us the strength and guidance to transform our own lives from weak and helpless to strong and able, Jesus calls us to now begin to work for Him. **Jesus Called His Disciples To See the Harvest** around them so that they could begin to work to bring in the harvest.

Now farmers know when it is time for their harvest to be gathered into the barns and storage

facilities. They recognize the time when the grains of wheat or barley or rye or corn are dry enough to safely store for the future. They know when the stalks turn brown and when the heads bow down toward the ground that the grain is ready to harvest. Jesus calls for us to recognize the conditions when the people around us are ready to hear the Good News of the Gospel in order to find the safety and promise of eternal life. When the people get to the end of themselves and find they are no longer able to fend for themselves, they begin to cry out. Do you hear anyone crying out today? Do you see the fields that are ripe for the harvest? Do you see the people who are desperately seeking something that has meaning and purpose that they can rely upon and put their hope in? They are all around us, but do we have the eyes to see the harvest that Jesus is point out to us?

There are folks protesting and calling out for justice and equality! There are folks who have lost their jobs and are struggling to make ends meet! There are folks who have lost their health and are being barraged with health conditions! There are folks who are being deceived by the predators of the world into believing that right is wrong and wrong is right! There are folks who are following empty religion and useless tradition! There are folks demanding to do what they want regardless of what any laws say! There are folks who are homeless and helpless! There are folks in powerful positions lording over the people in their own wisdom and strength. There are folks who claim to be shepherds of the sheep who are just as lost as the rest of the sheep! There are the poor, the lonely, the lost, the sick, the helpless, the vulnerable, and the rebellious! All of them are crying out for the Way, the Truth and the Life!

Harvest time is ready, but there is a problem! The workers are few! There are just not enough followers of Jesus who have eyes to see the ripe harvest of souls crying out for the Lord to save them! They are blind to the perfect opportunities to take the love of Jesus to the people and give them the knowledge of the gate to the sheepfold.

In the early days of American agriculture, when harvest time came to the country, the farmers found that they had a similar problem. Their fields were too large for them to successfully bring in all of

the crops that were ready to harvest by themselves. They simply could not do it all by themselves. They would work themselves to death trying to get the harvest in, but it was too much for them all by themselves. So what did they do? They gathered together with other local farmers to form a larger team of workers who could go from farm to farm gathering in all of the grain in the fields before the winter snows arrived. They pooled their resources, their equipment and their labor forces to make it happen. They worked together thrashing their wheat, shelling their corn, shucking the peas, and digging the potatoes and carrots and beets and rutabagas. They worked together to bring in the harvest. Where one person could not do it all by themselves, the group working together accomplished all of the work by joining forces and getting the work done.

We must take our cue from them to come **Become Prepared To Serve** the Lord and bring in the harvest of people all around us. It's not for just the pastors to do the work of evangelism and discipleship. It is for all followers of Jesus to see the need around them and get ready to work for the Lord to bring in His harvest. It is for each person to decide to help, even as they are, to bring in the harvest of souls of the people around. Not every person has to have the exact same skills as everyone else. Some may be good preaching the Good News. Others may be good at providing the needs of others. Some may have the skills of compassion and tenderness. Others have the gifts of organization. There are some gifted in music, and some gifted in administration, and some talented in teaching. Some are able to see deeply into the life of a person who is in need, but hides it well. Some are gifted in bringing emotional healing, while others are skilled at bringing physical healing. Some are talented to train folks how to manage their resources. Everyone has gifts given to them from the Lord, and when we all work together doing our own part, the harvest is sought out, and reached, and brought in, and saved. Folks, that's the work of the church, a team of people using their specialties to make sure that the harvest is brought in.

But the big question for each one of us is **How Far Will You See?** Will you take the time to see beyond your own home and family to see the needs of those around you? Will you take the time to look

at the fields of harvest? Will you look out to those on your own block and find how you might be able to assist them to come to know the Lord Jesus? Will you see those within your own ward to find the harvest that is ready? Will join forces with others to reach your own city, large or small? Will you look out and work together with others to address the issues within your county and state? Will you become aware of the harvest that is ripe within this nation? And will you look beyond your own to see the world's harvest that is ripe for the picking?

Jesus calls us to “*Pray to the Owner of the harvest that He will send out workers to gather in His harvest*” (Matt. 9:36). That means that we are to seek the Lord our God and ask Him to use us, even as we are to begin to reach out to the homeless, the helpless, the sick, the needy, and they empty. We are to take as much opportunity as we can to let God open our eyes to see the needs around us, and then to begin to address them through the special gifts that He has given to us to use for His Kingdom.

How might you support and encourage abused person? How might you bring release to the one who is trapped in a condition that is dangerous? What ways could you touch the life of one who is broken? How could you bring comfort to the ones who are lonely? How might you rescue the ones who are lost? You see, you don't have to look far to see that the fields ripe for the harvest of the Lord. All it takes is our willingness to see the people around us as our neighbors, our fellow human beings, who are in desperate need to find the One who can make all things new. But it demands our stepping out of our own world, and going into the larger world around us to accomplish the work of the Lord Jesus.

We too, have the capacity to bring healing. We too, are able to release people from the bonds that enslave them. We too, have the power to bring new life to the dying and the sick and the broken. But Will We Do It? **HOW FAR WILL YOU GO FOR JESUS?** Let's pray...Father, You have reached down to this planet with Your great love to show us how You desire us to live. Jesus has modeled it before us. Give us the courage today to use our gifts, given to us by You, through the direction of the Holy Spirit, to bring Your new life to those around us who are so desperately in need of You. Open our eyes to see them, Lord, in the name of Jesus Christ our Savior. Amen.