

“JOYFULLY SERVING THE LORD”
Acts 9:36-43, Revelation 7:9-17, John 10:22-30
May 7 & 8, 2022

I want to start out today’s message with a probing poem by Emma Lent, entitled *Unawares*. I ask you to listen carefully to this old poem.

They said, “**The Master is coming To honor the town to-day, And none can tell at what house or home The Master will choose to stay.**” And I thought while my heart beat wildly, What if He should come to mine? How would I strive to entertain And honor the Guest Divine!

And straight I turned to toiling To make my house more neat; I swept, and polished, and garnished, And decked it with blossoms sweet. I was troubled for fear the Master Might come ere my work was done, And I hastened and worked the faster, And watched the hurrying sun.

But right in the midst of my duties A woman came to my door; She had come to tell me her sorrows And my comfort and aid to implore. And I said, “I cannot listen Nor help you any, to-day; I have greater things to attend to.” And the pleader turned away.

But soon there came another—A cripple, thin, pale and gray—And said, “Oh, let me stop and rest A while in your house, I pray! I have traveled far since morning, I am hungry, and faint, and weak; My heart is full of misery, And comfort and help I seek.”

And I cried, “I am grieved and sorry, But I cannot help you to-day. I look for a great and noble Guest,” And the cripple went away; And the day wore onward swiftly—And my task was nearly done, And a prayer was ever in my heart That the Master to me might come.

And I thought I would spring to meet Him, And serve him with utmost care, When a little child stood by me With a face so sweet and fair—Sweet, but with marks of teardrops—And his clothes were tattered and old; A finger was bruised and bleeding, And his little bare feet were cold.

And I said, “I’m sorry for you—You are sorely in need of care; But I cannot stop to give it, You must hasten elsewhere.” And at the words, a shadow Swept o’er his blue-veined brow,—“Someone will feed and clothe you, dear, But I am too busy now.”

At last the day was ended, And my toil was over and done; My house was swept and garnished—And I watched in the dark—alone. Watched—but no footfall sounded, No one paused at my gate; No one entered my cottage door; I could only pray—and wait.

I waited till night had deepened, And the Master had not come. “He has entered some other door,” I said, “And gladdened some other home!” My labor had been for nothing, And I bowed my head and I wept, My heart was sore with longing—Yet—in spite of it all—I slept.

Then the Master stood before me, And his face was grave and fair; “Three times to-day I came to your door, And craved your pity and care; Three times you sent me onward, Unhelped and un comforted; And the blessing you might have had was lost, And your chance to serve has fled.”

“O Lord, dear Lord, forgive me! How could I know it was Thee?” My very soul was shamed and bowed in the depths of humility. And He said, “The sin is pardoned, But the blessing is lost to thee; For comforting not the least of Mine You have failed to comfort Me.”

Oh, there is great temptation to prepare our own lives in anticipation of the Lord Jesus coming to live in our hearts, but with the exclusion of another person who is in need. We get so wrapped up in our own daily schedules, our work loads, our men’s breakfasts and our lady’s teas, and we fail to see the presence of Jesus Christ in the people who are counted as the “least of these.” We have our clubs, our lessons, our hobbies, our duties at church, our vacations, our days off and our lives are so very busy all the time, that to have one who is needy stop our routine or our preparation seems to be such an imposition. And we whine and complain when we are interrupted, when all our work is not completed, expecting a greater and nobler Guest, but **we forget that we have been called into service for our Lord for such as the likes of these who seem to be an inconvenience.**

This last week I was once more reminded of Jesus’ words to His disciples in Matthew 20:26-28, “*Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave - just as the son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many.*” And once more it blindsided me that I was called to be a servant for the Lord Jesus with my whole life. We are not here for our own personal security and pleasure, but to serve and to love the Lord with all our heart, soul, mind and strength. Only then will we hear the words of Jesus, “*Well done, My good and faithful servant! ... Come and share in your Master’s happiness*” (Matthew 25:21 & 23). So I want us to consider how we can joyfully serve the Lord.

Today we heard about the faithful servant Tabitha, “*who was always doing good and helping the poor*” (Acts 9:36). She was working with destitute widows of her community. When she died, the people were heartbroken. Yet because of their great love for this marvelous servant Tabitha, God delighted to use Peter to bring life back to her in order that she might continue to serve those around her.

Because of the persecution of the Apostles and other believers of Jesus, instigated by Saul in Jerusalem, Peter had been traveling through the country and had decided to visit the saints in Lydda,

about 20 miles northeast of Jerusalem. (Show Slide) After healing a paralytic man named Aeneas, word got out that he was in Lydda. So when the people of Joppa heard that Peter was close, they sought him out with the prospect that he might also do a miraculous healing for Tabitha. While Peter had performed several healings, and had pronounced a death sentence on Ananias and Sapphira in Jerusalem, raising a person from the dead was not part of his ministry to that point. So we're not sure what the disciples of Jesus in Lydda were expecting.

But Peter had been with Jesus when he raised several people from the dead, particularly the daughter of Jairus. As an apostle of Jesus, Peter had been filled with the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, so when the urgent call came to minister in Joppa, Peter responded. And it was through the power of the Holy Spirit that he prayed and then commanded, "*Tabitha, get up*" (Acts 9:40)! And God restored her life to Tabitha so that she could continue to serve the destitute widows of Joppa.

Now imagine - what if Peter had focused on other things and had been too busy to heal Aeneas in Lydda? What if he had told the Christians from Joppa that he was too busy to go with them, that he had a "greater guest" to prepare for? What if he had given up on being a servant for Jesus and had just lived his life for himself? Aeneas would have remained a paralytic, Tabitha would have remained dead, and the Gospel of Jesus Christ would not have been extended by him beyond the city of Jerusalem. And God's blessings would have passed by Peter, and he would have once more become shamed.

But because Peter chose to live up to his promise to Jesus, that he would "*Take care of My sheep*" (John 21:16), his life was no longer his own. As a servant of the Risen Lord Jesus Christ, He gave up his own agenda for life, gave up fishing for fish, and began fishing for people. He had to humble himself into the service of Jesus in order to touch the lives of the people around him and fulfill Jesus' command to "*...be My witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth*" (Acts 1:8). And as he made himself available for the work of the Lord, God began to bless his ministry abundantly so that he was able to do great things. But he had to remain faithful in following

Jesus, allowing the Holy Spirit to use him to touch the lives of those around him with the love of God. Peter had to submit his life to the work of Jesus in order to be used by God.

So as Peter claimed Jesus' call in his life, he joyfully served the Lord everywhere he went, and God used him to take the Gospel message of Jesus to the Jewish followers. While Philip had gone first to the Samaritans and then had followed the Spirit's call to go toward Gaza (Acts 8:26), where he baptized the Ethiopian eunuch in the name of Jesus Christ, Peter had headed northeast to minister to the Jews who had received Jesus as their Savior at Lydda. He left the comfort of home and friends to be used by the Lord Jesus to bring relief to the hurting, the oppressed and the dying. He left the familiar community that he was acclimated to, and went where the fishing was good, and the fishermen were few. And God provided an abundant catch of people who came to Jesus because Peter was obeying Jesus' command to "*Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you...*" (Matthew 28:19-20).

And it was in Joppa that Peter was able to continue Jesus' ministry, even at the point of raising Tabitha from the dead, enabling her to continue to serve the people in her community. And as we'll discover more next week, this opened up Peter's ministry opportunity to the Gentiles in Caesarea. Because he was willing to serve the Lord Jesus, the doorway was opened to all of us to not only hear about the Word of the Lord, but to be able to receive Jesus Christ as our own Lord and Savior. More about that next week.

Our second Scripture lesson of Revelation 7 gives us a different view of joyfully serving the Lord. In John's vision from God, he saw "*a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb*" (Revelation 7:9). It is explained to him that "*These are they who have come out of the great tribulation,*" having kept their faith during the severe persecution and oppression they received as faithful witnesses for Jesus (see John 6:9-11). They had dedicated their own lives for the service of Jesus Christ. They had lived in faith for

Him, striving to help many others to receive Jesus as their Savior, too. They had humbled themselves to the ministry of Jesus, and lived according to the very Word of God before the peoples of the world.

And here we see this great multitude standing before the throne of God, not for judgement, but for reception into the Kingdom of God. *“They triumphed over him [the Devil] by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death”* (Rev. 12:11). They had committed their whole life in serving Jesus as their Master and Friend. They had repented of their sins, and claimed the Ways of God over the ways of the world. *“They [had] washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb”* (Rev. 7:14). They had given up on their own life goals to live for Jesus. They had sought out the laws and commandments of the Lord our God as being their life’s tenants by which to live by. They refused to follow the ways of the world, but fully sought out the things of the Lord. And the world hated them, just as the world hated Jesus. But they were more content in living for the Lord than to live by the ways of the world.

You see, we can’t live in both the ways of the world and in the ways of heaven. There is a choice to be made - which way we will turn. If we follow the ways of the world, there will be no joyful service to the Lord, because the world hates Jesus. By following the ways of the world, we give up all of the blessings that come from the Lord, and we have no power from the Holy Spirit. But if we live by the ways of the Lord, and we joyfully give ourselves to serve Him, we not only have His presence with us, but we receive His power and authority to do great things through the work of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, we need repentance in our life for seeking the things of this world, and that will give revival to us in our life and our church.

Henry Blackaby puts it this way, “Revival is when the fullness of God returns to the people of God because they have repented from where they had been going to where God now wants them to be - with Him. **When you get right with God, you will experience the incredible presence and power of God.** Do not ask God to come in power if you are not first going to ask Him to cleanse you and to make you holy and to make you the kind of person He could bring others to. If you are not seeing the power

of God working in your life and through your life, there is something from which you need to ask God to deliver you and set you free. Is it your mind? your heart? your actions? What is it that doesn't match the holiness of God?

“Repentance means to say, ‘O God, don’t let me be casual or careless in my walk with You. Don’t let me ever be satisfied to live without Your expressed presence and power in my life. Whatever is hindering You from working [in me], would You reveal it to me? And immediately I will repent of that.’

Blackaby goes on to say, “**Most of us are just one prayer away from being totally yielded to God.** Somehow we hesitate with that one simple prayer: ‘Lord, I yield everything in me to everything in You.’ Some of you are saying, ‘I’m not going to stay where I have been. I am going to move to a whole new level of relationship to God. I want a new freshness with God.’”¹ And that is the only way that we will ever be able to joyfully serve the Lord.

We can’t have sin in our life and expect God to use us for His glory. We can’t have the power of God in our life while sin resides in us. Unless we repent of the sin in our life, there can be no revival here in this church, or even in our own life. And we will lose the blessings that God has for us. Only as we have Jesus as our Shepherd, to guide us to do His work in our world today, can we have new life.

You see, as God makes the announcement that He will come be present in our houses or homes, He doesn’t want us to be diligently looking out for our own personal interests, but rather faithfully doing the work of the Lord everywhere we go and in everything we do. It’s not about us making a show of how good we are, but about us serving the Lord and sharing His Good News with all those around us who are hurting and in need of help. And we can only do that with Jesus in us by the Holy Spirit.

Jesus makes it clear to us that we have to have Him as Lord of our life. If we are to do anything worthwhile for the Lord, Jesus tells us that we must believe in Him as the Christ and to follow Him.

Listen to this teaching found in John 10:22-30. (READ John 10:22-30)

¹ (Henry Blackaby, Excerpted from the message ‘Revival Tarries Because Repentance Is Not preached’ given at the Heart-Cry for Revival Conference in April 2006. Found in *HERALD OF HIS COMING*, May/June 2022)

In order to joyfully serve the Lord, we must first find ourselves as one of His sheep. Sheep are dependent upon the care of their shepherd, and the shepherd protects and guides them on a daily basis. Without the care of the shepherd, the sheep are very vulnerable to attacks from predators, they are prone to wander away and become lost, and they really have no sense of direction. However, when the shepherd cares for them, the sheep learn to trust in the care given by the shepherd, and they know that he loves them enough to watch out for them. So they trust in him to the point that where he goes, they go. They spend their whole life with him, so they listen to his voice calling out to them that they might find their daily food and water.

When the Jews gathered around Jesus, they questioned if He was the Christ, and if He was, why He wouldn't tell them. Jesus simply explains it, *"I did tell you, but you do not believe. The miracles I do in my Father's name speak for me, but you do not believe because you are not My sheep. My sheep listen to My voice; I know them, and they follow Me"* (John 10:25-27).

In order to have the power of Jesus in our lives, we have to profess Him as our Savior, the Messiah, our Christ. We have to spend time with Him, learn about Him, trust in Him, believe in Him, and then accept Him as the Son of God. As we become His followers, then we have to submit ourselves to Him as a sheep does to the shepherd. Once we are under His care and control, we are then empowered to begin working for Him as one of His servants (sheep).

We have to humble ourselves to Jesus as our Master, so that by His authority, by His power, we can serve and work for Him. Without submitting ourselves to Jesus, we have no power of our own to do any kind of work for Him. Yet when we surrender ourselves to Jesus, as we become His servants, He gives us tremendous opportunities to share His Good News of Salvation with those around us. But we must take care not to become so busy that we miss the opportunities to be in ministry for Him.

Yet Jesus tells us, *"I give [My sheep] eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand"* (John 10:28). **There are huge benefits to being servants of our Master,**

Jesus. While the world decries any submission to a master as a form of slavery, when we humbly submit ourselves to the service of Jesus, our Lord and Master, we find tremendous blessings come along with being a servant for Him. **We not only inherit His power and authority given to us through His great love for us, but we also gain eternal life, such that can never be taken away from us.** I don't know about you, but I think those are great retirement benefits. Who wouldn't want that kind of "employment" benefit?

However, Jesus calls us to joyfully serve Him, not grudgingly or out of a sense of compulsion, but rather filled with love for Jesus such that your greatest desire is to please Him in all you do and say. Then, when God opens up our minds to find the opportunities to serve Him by touching the lives of others, it does not come as an inconvenience, but as a privilege. **No matter what situation you might be in right now, no matter what occupation you might hold, you can joyfully serve the Lord in all ways, being ready to touch the lives of "the least of these" that may come your way.** And then, as you serve the Lord by serving the people, you will find God's blessings flowing abundantly in your lives in order to continue to do the work of the Lord.

"Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God, so that He may exalt you at the proper time" (I Peter 5:6). Seek His ways and follow Jesus with your whole heart, so that you might do great things by joyfully serving Him. Let's pray.

Father, it is so tempting for us to focus our whole lives on satisfying our own delights and pleasures, and thereby miss the chances to serve You. Thank You for the call to be obedient followers of Jesus Christ, so that we might be open each day to see the ways that we might touch the lives of those who are hurting, those who need encouragement, or those who could use our help. Forgive us of our selfishness and self-centeredness. Enable us to see as You see, and love as You love so that we might remain faithfully employed by You to fulfill Your Salvation of the world. Give us the courage we need to humble ourselves before You each day, so that You might use us as You would, in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord and Master, the great Shepherd of the sheep, our Savior. AMEN.