

Serve the Lord With All Your Heart

I Samuel 12:20-25

Transfiguration Sunday, January 25, 2015

Beloved of the Lord.....Before we begin with our text this morning, it is necessary to understand the background to today's lesson. Just previous to our text today the Israelites had desired an earthly king rule over them. Though God had been ruling them directly through the prophets, Moses, Joshua, and now Samuel, the people said to Samuel, "Behold, thou art old, and thy sons walk not in thy ways: now make us a king to judge us like all the nations." They were guilty of two sins here. First they coveted the ungodly nations which had kings. They wanted to be like everybody else, and they admired those earthly kingdoms. But their greater sin was they had rejected the rule of God Himself, for when Samuel told the Lord their request, God answered, "Hearken unto the voice of the people in all that they say unto thee: for they have not rejected thee, but they have rejected me, that I should not reign over them."

Of course we are guilty today in the same way. We like to think that if we were the president or governor, we would do better. We also forget God is the One ruling behind the "powers that be". Though it is certainly true a nation is better off when Christians are in office, and if our young men are not interested the ministry, it is certainly a good work if they serve God in the civil office: Christians in government are not the magical formula to good government. The reason is Christians still have the same sinful flesh as non-Christians. Thus man by his own nature is quite incapable of ruling others perfectly because when we have power, we tend to slant things in our own best interest at the cost of our neighbor.

John Calvin is an example of this, for he was a Christian reformer who lived in Luther's day. There was a time when Calvin became ruler of Geneva, but he didn't keep Church and State separate as God commands. He made the citizens take a creed test, and then he determined by such who was Protestant and who was not. "Those who refused to be Protestants were banished, while others - a large number - who were zealous for the Protestant cause, were allowed in. The citizens were closely watched for infractions of the laws. Punishment, including banishment and even death, was applied to those who broke the laws of the Church and remained incorrigible." (Lutheranism: From Wittenberg to the USA. Luther, the Reformation, and Lutheranism in America). During four years of his reign, 58 people were put to death, and many others banished. And so while it is good to pray that God will give us wise Christian rulers, we still need God above to rule our country (even through the ungodly), and we Christians below must always keep Church and State separate. God's purpose of the State is to maintain peace in the land and keep citizens from hurting one another. So God has given the sword to the State, so our rulers can punish us if we break the law. The Bible says, "he is the minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain." Of course God's purpose for the Church is very different. The purpose of the Church is to preach the Gospel and thereby win souls for Christ. We don't use the sword of the government to compel people as Calvin did (or the Muslims for that matter) rather God has given us the Sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God, the Gospel of Jesus

Christ. When we preach and teach that great name Jesus, sinners are made saints, and love for God and neighbor move us to be good and peaceable citizens. Therefore, as Samuel said, “fear the LORD, and serve him in truth with all your heart: for consider how great things he hath done for you.”

That brings us back to these Israelites who rejected God’s rule, wanting a king. As a sign of His wrath against them God sent thunder and lightnings so they feared for their life. They then confessed to Samuel their sin and Samuel answered Fear not: ye have done all this wickedness. And turn ye not aside: for then should ye go after vain things, which cannot profit nor deliver; for they are vain. Samuel is thus saying “You forsook God once and did wickedly, but don’t go astray again chasing after the gods of this world that cannot profit nor save you from your sins!” How true this is! For when a Christian is tempted and seduced so they no longer confess and repent of their sins, their heart is hardened against Jesus and they begin justifying themselves by their works. They bow down to and create a new idol in their heart which they will not forsake. Take a Christian man, for example, who is tempted to commit adultery and then does so. In one moment he throws away Christ his Savior only so he can experience sinful pleasure for a few moments. Loving the sin his heart refuses to repent. Man forsakes God, and so God must forsake man. But of course the sin could be pornography, drunkenness, or any other sin which the sinner stubbornly continues in, refusing to repent. That is now their new idol, though the first commandment says, “Thou shalt have no other gods before me”. What does this mean? “We should fear, love, and trust in God above all things.” If we allow our hearts to love anything in this world more than God, that is our idol that we bow down to. Yet that idol cannot profit or save us. It is the devil’s snare to our soul. This is why repentance is necessary for every Christian. Not that we’re saved by repenting, but refusing to repent of the sin and continuing therein destroys faith and drives out God’s Spirit. Man first forsakes God, then God forsakes man.

Speaking now particularly of the sin of coveteousness, since the Israelites coveted a king, let us discuss what is called women’s rights. Consider that the term women’s rights is used today to uphold the right of a woman to abort her unborn child. This is like one man saying to his neighbor, “I judge that your life will be an inconvenience to me, therefore I have the right to kill you.” And so in our own country today, countless mothers and fathers abort their own offspring because they covet a “better life” without a child. Coveteousness is the root sin of all the abortions in this country, and since Roe v. Wade, over 50 million babies have been aborted, murdered! Likewise do not overlook the common ground that abortion has with birth control. The root sin in both cases is coveteousness. Parents in both situations judge they will have more money and a better life without children, even though God says “Be fruitful and multiply” and “Happy is the man whose quiver is full of them.”

Thus let us all hear God’s warning today and diligently take heed not to turn aside, to depart from the saving faith of Jesus Christ. We’re all guilty of conveteousness, just as we have all sinned by idolatry, and the blood of Christ alone cleanses us from all these

sins. Doing good works, no matter how fine or noble we may judge them to be, will not gain entrance for sinners into heaven, because the Bible says, “by the deeds of the law shall no flesh be justified”. Again this is why Samuel said, turn ye not aside: for then should ye go after vain things, which cannot profit nor deliver; for they are vain.

For the LORD will not forsake his people for his great name's sake: because it hath pleased the LORD to make you his people. These are now the Gospel promises we need which do indeed give us the strength not to forsake God but to hold fast and faithful! Though we were not God's people by way of our sins, God made us His people by way of His grace, through the great and saving name of His Son, Jesus Christ. Thus the promise is GOD WILL NOT FORSAKE US FOR HIS GREAT NAME'S SAKE. This great and gracious name is JESUS, for “thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins.” When we are thus fearful or worried about falling away, when we are afraid of temptation and our own sinful flesh, we have the sweet promise from God He will not forsake us for Jesus' sake! God is faithful! And mark this point also, even if we realize even now that we did fall away and turned to idols, it is still not too late now to repent and be saved, for Romans 10:13 promises, “whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.” In other words the door to heaven is still open for fallen sinners, even fallen Christians, because the blood of Christ provides free forgiveness for ALL sinners. Whatever you have done, Jesus through the cross forgives you! Therefore consider how great things he hath done for you. His blood always keeps the door propped open for all fallen sinners, therefore let us all confess and forsake our sins. So Proverbs 28 says, “He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy. Happy is the man that feareth alway: but he that hardeneth his heart shall fall into mischief.”

Thus again we're saved by His name, and not our own. We have no name on earth which carries any weight or power to save us. In this congregation, for example, someone's last name begins with the letter B, and we continue all the way through the alphabet till we reach T, U, V, W, and finally Y. Yet these are all letters, offspring, descendants of our eldest father, sinful Adam. Our ancestors thus cannot help us, and it is idolatry to pray to the dead, even our departed spouse who cannot hear us. Yet if they died in the Christian faith, they are much like Moses and Elijah who talk with Jesus on the Mount. We don't build altars for them in our heart, but we thank Jesus who saved them from their sins so they were received into heaven. Therefore do not give any weight or strength to your ancestry or family name. Our family name is Adam and that is why you will die. Likewise as Samuel said if ye shall still do wickedly, ye shall be consumed, both ye and your king. Don't continue in your sins without repentance, but confess them and forsake them, believing on the blood of Jesus Christ alone for salvation. And if we die in that blessed faith, rest assured like Moses and Elijah, we also will immediately enter heaven because Jesus said, “He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life.” Likewise Jesus said, “Rejoice because your names are written in heaven”. Likewise Jesus promised in Revelation three, “He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment; and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels.”

Finally beloved, the last words of Samuel to God's people, Moreover as for me, God forbid that I should sin against the LORD in ceasing to pray for you: but I will teach you the good and the right way: Only fear the LORD, and serve him in truth with all your heart: for consider how great things he hath done for you. This meant the prophet Samuel would not be bitter against them, but he would continually pray for them and teach the sacred and saving truth of God's Word. Likewise may God help me, your pastor, to pray for you, that you will keep yourself from sin and temptation. May God help you not to turn away from Jesus or His blessed blood-bought forgiveness, but "fear the Lord and serve Him in truth with all your heart." Consider all the wonderful things Jesus has done to set you free of sin, and is still doing by the power of His Spirit working in the Word. He is worthy then dear believer, of all your love, all your praise, with all your heart. Don't give God the leftovers in your life, but give Him your firstfruits, for Jesus fought dearly for you, and He suffered and died dearly for you, that you through Him might live forever with Him in heaven. Do not then turn away from Him in sin, but turn to Him in faith and cling to Him with all your heart rejoicing, for He will never let you go. Serve him in truth with all your heart: for consider how great things he hath done for you. Amen.