



September 2, 2007

Today

For the last two weeks I've looked at the history behind and the message of two great hymns, All Hail the Power of Jesus' Name and Joyful Joyful We Adore Thee. Both are songs of praise and both can lead to uplifting and inspiring feel good sermons. I guess that's natural when we consider what the almighty God of the universe has done for us. We should feel blessed, we should be happy and joyous and we should be led to give thanks and praise because we are children of God and heirs of heaven. As Henry Van Dyke wrote in Joyful Joyful we Adore Thee, "God our Father Christ our brother all who live and love are thine." We are family, we belong to God and we are bound for heaven. Two week ago we saw that the definition of heaven really is "to be with Jesus". In today's sermon we will begin to explore ho two prepare for heaven or to prepare to be with Jesus.

Paul writes to the people of Philippi in Philippians 2:12 and said, "continue to work out your salvation." We may bristle when we hear that after all we are saved by grace through faith at least that's what Ephesians 2:8-9 tells us, "By grace you have been saved through faith this is not your own doing it is a gift of God not because of works lest any man should boast." But please understand Ephesians 2:8-9 is not a call to be lax, for from it. The very next verse continues and says, "We are created to do good works", or as James says in James 2 he gives a command, "show me your faith I'll show you my works faith without works is dead." So what are we supposed to do? What is the work God expects of us? What do we give Him as a thank offering or how do we give Him worship that is worthy for what He has done?

Romans 12:1&2 makes it very clear what God is looking for. Paul writes and says, "Therefore I urge you brothers in view of God's mercy," understand God is merciful when He makes us heirs of the

kingdom of heaven because we don't deserve so Paul says, "I urge you brothers in view of God's mercy to offer your bodies as living sacrifices holy and pleasing to God this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind then you will be able to attest and approve what God's will is." Paul tells us that we are number one to give our lives to Him that's our way of showing thanks for His mercy to us. But he continues and he says, "Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world." Note he says, "any longer", all of us are sinners, all of us have changes to make, all of us have changes to make today. Hebrews 4:7 tells us that, "God has set a day for us to hear his voice and make a change" he calls that day today. We are to be transformed by the renewing of our minds.

Transformed means "changed" renewed means "turned back" turned back to what we should be. This is how we prepare for heaven but what does that transformation look like? What could we see in James when he said, "you show me your faith and I'll show you my works", that would show his faith? How do we really give our lives as a spiritual sacrifice? Welcome to an exciting journey it begins today. You will hear the voice of God not because I claim to know the mind of God or claim to have some special relationship with Him. No, far from it; but you will hear His voice because it is going to be quoted. I will be quoting scripture today. You might like what I read and you might not. If you don't I suggest that you need to go to your Bible and circle the verses that I have read that you don't like because that is an area that needs work in your life. But understand when it is read from the Bible it is God's word.

Let's first of all begin with a single word a word that I think all of us claim, Christian. Christian simply means "Christ like" or "belonging to Christ". It was first given to the believers in Antioch as mentioned in Acts 11:26. Are you a Christian or Christ like? I can say to everyone of you here today and listen carefully right now you are. Why can I say that? Luke 4:16 tells us, "Jesus went to Nazareth where He had been brought up and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue as was His custom." I know I've mentioned this before but it was Christ's custom to go to church each week because the Sabbath happens each week. Notice what Luke does not say. He does not say, "It was Christ's custom that when it was convenient he went to the synagogue." It does not say, "Customarily Christ went to the synagogue for the special festivals." It does not say, "on the

first Sabbath of the month Christ went to the synagogue as was his custom.” It was his custom to go on the Sabbath which occurs once a week and is in total accord with the fourth commandment, “remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy”, and we often thinking of holy as meaning perfect but holy means set apart it is God’s command that we are to set apart one day each week for Him. Now some people will say oh I do that pastor I set apart a day for God each week I just don’t feel that need to go to church and be with everyone else I worship God my own way. And I must say that someone that says that cant get much more biblical than one they’re saying. Hebrews 10:25 says, “Let us not give up meeting together as some are in the habit of doing let us encourage one another and all the more as you see the day approaching.”

You see a person that says is being very biblical but the writer to the Hebrews says that we are not to give up meeting together as some are in the habit of doing. Even 2,000 years ago some people were in the habit of not going to church and making excuses for it. They weren’t meeting together the writer to the Hebrews says don’t do that. In fact he says, “Let us encourage one another all the more as you see the day”, that’s judgment day, “approaching”. We are 2,000 years closer to judgment day than the time of these people who received the letter. Using that kind of logic using what that writer wrote we are so much closer we should probably be here daily. Quite a sobering thought isn’t it? But it’s right there in scripture. As I’ve quoted before Colossians 1:24 Paul writes and says, “Now I rejoice in what was suffered for you and I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ’s afflictions for the sake of His body which is the church.” The church is the body of Christ its right there in scripture. Therefore, if heaven is to be with Christ and that is exactly what scripture tells us it is in fact that’s exactly what Jesus says we can prepare for heaven by practicing heavenly living. Being at church fellowshiping with your Christian brothers and sisters you are communing with Christ when you do this for the church is His body. When we are together here right now when we are joined together as the body the church we are with Christ. It is a little bit of heaven on earth.

But speaking of communing isn’t that what Jesus said we are supposed to? He said, “do this in remembrance of me.” It saddens my heart when I see people who claim to be Christians yet don’t come faithfully to Communion. Jesus commands us to do this. It

also saddens my heart when I see people who only come to church when there is Communion. It is as if it is a magic bullet or good luck charm but Communion twelve times a year does not a Christian make. I'll tell you what does cheer my heart. What makes me proud as a pastor. That's when members go on vacation and they bring back bulletins from the churches that they went to while they were away. You see they show their faith by their faithful work. They have set the Sabbath aside it is a holy day for them. They are communing with the body of Christ whether they are here at Zion or whether they are on the road and at a church in Nevada or Nebraska or South Dakota or wherever they may be.

God has set aside a day He calls it today do you hear His voice? Today is the day for you, your family, and your friends. Are you going to listen to it and be transformed and be renewed and give your life as a living sacrifice? Are you going to make the Sabbath day holy each and every week, as was Christ's custom? And if you have family and friends are you going to share with them the truth of God's word we are to be here right now every week every time because of God's mercy to us.

In our Savior's name, Amen.