

“Workmen Approved”
Pastor John Bronson

John 10:31-42

July 15, 2012

Message for 7/15/12, **Text**, John 10:31-42, **Title**, “Workmen Approved”

Ministry Moment: Missions (check on this with Dennis. A number of our young people have gone on short term missions. Perhaps a report from them: Erin Ballantyne and Regan Lundberg I know.)

Call to worship: Psalm 67: 1-7 and prayer

Worship theme: We are called to be Christ in the World

Sunday Evening in God’s Word
The Sermon on the Mount: The Beatitudes, #4, Righteousness
5:30 pm to 7:00 pm in the Music Building

Pre Service Song:

“This Is My Father’s World” Song # 143

Welcome and Announcements

Call to Worship and Prayer Psalm 67:1-7

Offering and Offertory:

“Shall We Gather At the River” by JoySong

Preparing the Heart in Song:

“Shout to the Lord” overhead

“The Heart of Worship” overhead

Message: “Workmen Approved” John 10:31-42

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Response to the Word:

“Stand Up, Stand Up for Jesus” Song # 730

Parting Word of Grace and Invitation to Prayer

Sunday Evening Studies:

5:30-7 pm in the Music Building
The Sermon on the Mount:
The Beatitudes, #4, Righteousness

Lois McMartin and EFCA ReachGlobal Ministries: the Spirit will gift Lois with strength for travel and wisdom for counsel as she travels overseas to missionary families; the Lord will raise up both short term and career missionaries for worldwide missions, the financial downturn and economic recession will not compromise the worldwide effectiveness of the Free Church missions

President Obama: the Lord will direct him to put his presidential responsibilities ahead of his campaigning interests; the Spirit will open his mind to true wisdom for life and governance; the Father will over-rule him for what is redemptive and best for the nation.

Youth Ministry: the summer ministries will be effective in reaching out to unchurched youth as well as building a core of youth leaders; the Lord will enable the adult volunteers to build a strong leadership team; the Lord will effectively use the summer intern for the group and his own growth

Military or Public Service Personnel of the Week: TSgt. Pete Gibson, U.S. Air Force Reserves (Husband of Marjorie): that his reenlistment go through without any problems

Young Adult of the Week: Aaron Bowen at Butte College (son of Randy and Ruth): that he pass the coming year with flying colors; for the Lord’s clear leading in his job applications for either a local EMT position or to the San Jose police department

Please pray for the health and recovery of our church family: Carol Bernerd, Harley Chapman Sr., Nathan Giordano, Diane Kinnamont, Carol Koehler, Roseanne Lane, Larry McFall, Dick & Jane Miller, John Montgomery, Fred & Jean Pauly, Phil Peterson, Jean Price, Cindy Rodney, John Stancik, Wally Yates

(please call the office to request updates to this list)

I want to walk us into an understanding of the centrality of us being workmen for God. That is where I want us to arrive. I want us to understand. The way to arrive there is to take a little detour through Romans I. Here is a classic question: what is the purpose of man? The classic answer is: the purpose of man is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever. That statement comes out of the Westminster Confession of Faith, one of the most widely known of the [Christian] Confessions [of Faith which summarize what we believe], and that is probably one of the most widely known of the propositions from that Statement of Faith. Ours, the age that you and I live in, is a hedonistic age. Hedonism [says the purpose of life] is simply the pursuit of pleasure. This is a point of view that has soaked deeply into the body of Christ. We swim in the water of our culture and there is no way we can avoid its contamination. That is simply is going to happen to us. This is one of the ways in which we have been profoundly affected. Generally speaking, if you pick up that comment about the purpose of man is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever, we tend to land on the second half. We are very concerned and very alert to the whole matter of enjoying God. We tend to concentrate more on the business of enjoying God than we do on glorifying Him. You don't talk that way, but this is how it tends to work. We tend to concentrate on enjoying God because we are convinced that is what glorifies Him. John Piper, many of you know who he is, I am a great fan of John Piper: He calls himself a Christian hedonist. This is his classic statement: “God is most glorified when we are most satisfied in Him.” I say amen to that. I have no argument with that at all. But I do have hesitations. Because as with all things human, we can twist them about and make them mean what they shouldn't. Arriving at the reality of this truth that we are most satisfied in God is a journey. In the first stage of the journey we are likely, as I said, to be most occupied with our enjoyments and satisfactions under the notion that the intensity of our satisfactions and our happiness is the essence of what glorifies God. That is where we usually start. For those who persevere on the journey a critical turning takes place such that we realize that we are most satisfied and find our greatest enjoyment in that which glorifies God. The focus shifts from “me in the spot-light” to God in the spotlight. That is the essential shift which is not always made. I said that we would be looking at Romans. Romans 1:5-6. If you are there you might want to look at this. Romans is the great classic statement of Christian doctrine written by the apostle Paul, and here he actually gives to us the purpose of preaching and teaching the gospel. “...we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name among all the nations, including you who are called to belong to Jesus Christ.” There it is: the heart of the gospel, the fulfillment of the gospel, the living out of the gospel is the obedience of faith which brings glory to the name of God. When we are engaged in that, when we sense that our lives are in the stream of God's purpose, we have a joy which the unbeliever simply cannot comprehend. In that joy we glorify God.

Now turn in you scriptures to John 10. This is the ongoing conversation between Jesus and the Pharisees and scribes for the most part. I will start by reading from v. 31, “*The Jews picked up stones again to stone Jesus.*” They keep asking Jesus in this passage, “Tell us who you are.” Then Jesus says, “If I tell you who I am, you are going to try and kill me.” And that is what they do on a regular basis. “*Then Jesus answers them, I have shown you many good works from the Father; for which of them are you going to stone me? The Jews answered him, It is not for a good work that we are going to stone you but for blasphemy, because you, being a man, make yourself God.*” Here we see that in response to the Jews Jesus, having bluntly asserted His divinity in the 30th verse, the Jews take up stones to execute Him. This is not the first time they have made the attempt. The idea that the promised messiah was actually divine was simply blasphemous to the Jews, and you and I should sympathize with that. The long journey of Israel was in part to escape idolatry. Idolatry, among other things, is the confusing of the transcendent God with that which He has created. The idea that we would worship a man, a creature, as if that man was God, was blasphemous, it was idolatry to the Jew. So for the Jew to hear that and accept that was an extreme difficulty. When we read John's gospel we ought not to under estimate the rigidity of the wall that they had built against that improper worship.

But the resistance of the Jews was more than an abhorrence of idolatry. There was as well a resistance and even a rejection of the very presence and power of God altogether. That is what, when you listen, you begin to realize that

that was in fact what was going on between Jesus and the scribes and Pharisee. [This was, however, ironic because] Israel had always known of the active presence and power God. This was the role of the prophets. Israel was not an ordinary people. They knew they were not ordinary. The entire existence of the Israelite nation was the fruit of divine intervention, and that divine intervention had been accomplished by God through prophets. He called Abraham. He called Moses. Later He called Elijah. He called [Elisha]. Still later He called Micah, Amos, Joel, Jeremiah, Habakkuk. Then, after the kingdoms themselves have fallen into complete disarray, He calls Ezekiel, He calls Daniel. After the exile and finally [when] the Jews are brought back to the Promised Land, He called Haggai and Zechariah and Malachi. Again and again and again God intervenes in the life of Israel and He intervenes in the life of Israel with His prophets. They speak the Word of God and they call the people back from their errant ways. You could not, they could not comprehend who they were and simply ignore the reality of the prophets and the intervention of God into their lives: not possible.

Consequently, Jesus does not present Himself as the Son of God; He presents Himself to the Jews as a prophet. Did you ever wonder why when you read through the scriptures every now and then you read this little statement: the demons whom Jesus cast out of those whom they possessed would cry out and they would say, “You are the Son of God” and Jesus without exception said, “Shut up! Nobody is talking about Me being the Son of God.” Why [was this so]? It was not timely.

Let us go back again to John 10:31-39 and listen to the fuller statement.

“The Jews picked up stones again to stone him. Jesus answered them, ‘I have shown you many good works from the Father; for which of them are you going to stone me?’ The Jews answered him, ‘It is not for a good work that we are going to stone you but for blasphemy, because you, being a man, make yourself God.’ Jesus answered them, ‘Is it not written in your Law, “I said, you are gods”? If he called them gods to whom the word of God came—and Scripture cannot be broken—do you say of him whom the Father consecrated and sent into the world, “You are blaspheming,” because I said, “I am the Son of God”? If I am not doing the works of my Father, then do not believe me; but if I do them, even though you do not believe me, believe the works, that you may know and understand that the Father is in me and I am in the Father.’ Again they sought to arrest him, but he escaped from their hands.”

It was the business, it was the calling and consecration of the scribes and Pharisees not just to know but actually to memorize the scriptures, and most of them had memorized huge portions of them. You can be certain that they were familiar with Psalm 82 which is where this statement comes from. Rather than letting the statement disturb them – how would a Jew respond if somebody said, “Well those three people are gods”? They would be horrified. So what did they do when they read Psalms 82:6-7? They do what we do when we encounter things we don’t like or understand. The way to handle these things is to avoid uncomfortable truth we either ignore it or we reinterpret it according to our prejudices and preconceptions. So you can imagine that is what they have done. They have no anticipation of what this might mean in reality. The point that the psalmist is making is that we are made in the image and likeness of God. There is a unique connection, a shared reality between us and God. This connection most emphatically does not lift us above the place of accountability: if we sin we die. But God allows humanity to experience, participate in and exercise powers which come to us from God. The Jews knew this, because that is what it meant to be a prophet.

Jesus likens Himself to a prophet. He is not diminishing himself. He is seeking to open the understanding of His opponents. His words are designed to speak to us [as well]. We are not likely to diminish Jesus. But we are likely to diminish ourselves. We face the constant temptation to diminish ourselves as regards the potential for the Lord working through us. Paul wrote letters to instruct and encourage local congregations. He also wrote letters to encourage individuals. He wrote this in 2 Timothy 2:15. Joel Cook, please recite that verse: *“Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth.”* That beloved is the AWANA verse, and that is the AWANA missionary, and if he had not known that

verse, I would have made a big laughing stock out of him! It is a phenomenal verse. Listen to what it says. What it says is, you and I are called to be and are equipped to be workmen approved by God. We should be amazed, not only at that affirmation of who we can be, but we should be amazed at the good work which AWANA clubs do around the world. How many – probably thousands if not tens of thousands of children have been brought to know the Lord Jesus Christ! This is miraculous. It is easy for us to miss this. It is easy for it to come under, as it were below the radar of our sensors looking for the “amazing works of God.”

Rightly handling the word is what is called an ordinary means of grace. What does it mean to be a means of grace? A “means of grace” is simply an instrument or vehicle through which the power of God operates to bring salvation in all of its various forms to bear upon the lives of men. I would contend, see if you agree with me, that we have already experienced the means of grace this morning. When those ladies sang about love for one another, how many felt within yourself a stirring of excitement and a recognition of a truth profound and deep that would grab your heart and would encourage you to continue the walk of faith in forgiving one another. How many, when Joe talked about his realization that when he had much he gave little and now when he has little he gives much and he knows joy in the giving, how many of you said, “Amen!” [Those are] are the ordinary workings of the means of grace. That is the Holy Spirit pressing home upon our hearts and our minds the truth of God.

That verse relates directly to what Paul wrote in 2 Timothy 3:10-17. We are probably quite familiar with the last two verses of this passage. How many recognize this: *“All scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work.”* However we will gain a deeper appreciation if we pick up the whole passage beginning at verse 10. This is what Paul writes to Timothy.

“You, however, have followed my teaching, my conduct, my aim in life, my faith, my patience, my love, my steadfastness, my persecutions and sufferings that happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium, and at Lystra—which persecutions I endured; yet from them all the Lord rescued me. Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, while evil people and impostors will go on from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived. But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work.”

You know what you could do? You could get up in the morning and you could look up at the sky and you could say, “By the grace of God I am equipped to do every good work.” And that would be true, assuming, of course, that you are consistent in feeding your inner man on the Word of God, for it is scripture that is breathed out and is able to equip us.

The common thread through all this is good works. Jesus performed good works so as to bear witness for God, righteousness and truth in a sinful world of lies and rebellion against God and hardheartedness. You and I are called to follow Jesus. We are called to perform good works in a world that is sinful and in rebellion and is filled with hardened hearts.

Let’s call this stage 2 [in salvation]: stage 1 is where God’s saving me is all about me, and stage 2 is where God saving me is all about God (I’m getting there)! I realize that if I am going to be His witness, then I am going to do good works. Here is stage 3. Later in John’s Gospel he cites Jesus making this statement in John 14:12. You will recognize this instantaneously as one of those verse that you just don’t know for sure what to do with. *“...whoever believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do, because I am going to the Father.”* Did you ever puzzle over that? But that is not where it ends. You have to go to the next verse and you get really perplexed. In the next verse what Jesus says is that *“...whatever you ask in my name, this I will do...”* You

know, beloved, I really believe that if the Jews in Jesus’ day had a hard time with Psalm 82:6-7, “you are gods”, you and I have a really hard time with John 14:12-13. “What do you mean we will do greater works than Jesus? I think it is time we close our Bibles and go home and be real.” To rightly understand and know how to apply these words of Jesus is a long study, but we can make a beginning. I believe that our difficulty in understanding these verses comes from separating what Jesus says from what He does. We tend to dream of all kinds of amazing things: works greater than walking on water; works greater than stilling the storm, raising the dead, giving sight to the blind and healing the lame, or feeding the multitudes. Human beings tend to be fascinated with extraordinary works of grace, with what we see as supernatural power. How many of you ever looked at video games? [This is] not highly recommended. Not long ago I was persuaded by [one of] my sons to watch “The Matrix”. It is amazing: power!

What is it about power? On the one hand I think that we long for power to cover over our fears. There is another reason we want power: we desire power to simply silence our opponents. The last ties these together: power will make me magnificent, and safe. I believe that those three statements embody much of the fascination we have with power, particularly in the realm of interpersonal relationships. Power becomes a wall by which we hold away from us all that will cause pain.

Now our thinking needs to be corrected by a careful consideration of the Biblical record of Jesus ministry as well as of Paul’s. Both performed miracles, the amazing kind. Both did so as acts of compassion, and both did so as part of their witness. Jesus on His part did many miracles as a testimony regarding His favor with God, and then, of course, His identity as the Son of God. Paul also performed many miracles. But have you ever noticed the way they are recorded: Hardly at all! He alludes to them on occasion, but overwhelmingly what we learn from Paul as well as of him concerns his role as what: As a preacher and teacher of the gospel. So can we say this: did Paul do greater works than Jesus? Instinctively we say no. But remember what Jesus said. What did He say? What He said was, you will do greater works than I! We instinctively say, “No”. Now there is a this and a that about it, isn’t there? We all understand that: there is an issue here that we have to walk through very carefully. If anybody was sacrificially committed and dedicated to glorifying the Lord Jesus Christ, it was Paul. So if Paul did not and could not perform any greater works than Jesus, we have got a huge problem on our hands, because we have no example of anybody who ever did what Jesus said would be true. Do you understand the problem? How many think Jesus made mistakes, or just said things because they would be impressive? It is not true. This is where the recalibration of our minds and our hearts is essential to the purposes of God. What did Paul do better than Jesus? At the end of the day when Jesus returns right before His ascension [there is] a maximum of about 120 people who believe that He is the messiah. At the end of the day when Paul is probably decapitated in Rome, there were probably tens if not hundreds of thousands who already believed in Jesus as the messiah. That is impressive. Paul traveled throughout most of the Roman Empire. He planted church after church after church.

But there is more to the matter than that alone. We know that Jesus uniquely of all humanity lived a perfect life. He was perfect in faith and righteousness, and He gave His life as the sufficient sacrifice for the sin of all humanity. No one equals that. That work stands beyond the reach of any [in] any time, [in] any place. Out of that work comes our strength and wisdom.

Jesus accomplished all that He had done without any inward drag of sin, but you and I don’t. You and I face the constant challenge and at times the seemingly irresistible downward drag of sin against the aspiration of our souls. So how do we survive? Jesus said this, we will do greater works than He because He goes to the Father. When Jesus went to the Father, what did He do? [He did] two things: He sends the His Spirit and He intercedes with the Father. So in the mystery of the divine being – don’t ask me to try to figure that out! – He is continuously speaking your name and my name before the Father, interceding for us as the Spirit of God Himself indwells us and grants to us the wisdom and strength of God to live righteously on the face of the earth. We are given the scriptures. We are given the Spirit. We are given the sufficiency of God’s grace. We are given the competency of the Spirit

working through us. This is what Paul says in 2 Corinthians 3:4-6a, *“Such is the confidence that we have through Christ toward God. Not that we are sufficient in ourselves to claim anything as coming from us, but our sufficiency is from God, who has made us competent to be ministers of a new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit.”* So when you are lying in bed and whether or not you have opened your eyes, depending on your temperament and disposition, and you say, “I am competent...” remember to say, “...because I am indwelt by the Holy Spirit of the ever living God, I have been forgiven of my sins, and I have received through Him His wisdom and power to walk faithfully through the world.” That is a good way to start your day!

However there is something extraordinary present and at work here. Listen to the words of Paul as he learned to think differently. How do we learn to think differently? As you are turning to 2 Corinthians 12:7-10, let me ask you a question: how many have a nagging problem? If it is your spouse, that is another matter, but let’s try and concentrate on things less ominous than that! A nagging problem, something that you said to God, “God, why don’t you take care of this?” That is what this [passage] is about. This is what Paul writes: *“So to keep me from being too elated by the surpassing greatness of the revelations – did you ever watch some of these TV shows, the religious ones? Did you ever wonder how it is they can carry on the way they do: it is by spitting in the eye of God. Don’t ever forget that. When you see some person prancing around, boasting, glorifying, exulting in the magnificent things they have gotten from God, remember what Paul said, and ask yourself, “What am I hearing?” because Paul said, “...so to keep me from being too elated by the surpassing greatness of the revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass me, to keep me from being too elated. Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that it would leave me. But he said to me...”* “Grace, grace, grace.” Let me repeat that: “Dependency upon my good favor, dependency upon my good favor, dependency upon my good favor.” Let me repeat that: “You are not to operate independently of your dependency on Me, you are not to strike out on your own as if you could handle things on your own, you are to bend your will to be conformed with My will, you are to make your mind agree with My thoughts, you are not to be elated, but submissive.” *“My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in...”* Do you understand where we have gotten? Human beings love power. I was at the corner of Orodam Boulevard and Olive Highway, that favorite place where the light is always red? I am putting along in my turbo charged [1995 Ford] Contour, and off to my left some guy is on a motor cycle, and he can’t just start. He goes vroom, and spins himself up in the air and [roars off]. I thought that was fairly impressive. I didn’t hope would hit anybody or anything, but there could have been a hole or something that would make him bounce! Isn’t it honestly, truly that we love power, the thrill and the exhilaration! *“My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness...”* [Our instinctive response is,] this cannot be true, this cannot be right, this cannot be what I want! I want to be magnificent. I want to amaze people. I would like to open my mouth and have them all fall down! *“Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong.”*

That is the first: second. Remember this is the third stage. We are fascinated with power, but Jesus taught us not only to think differently, but He also taught us to live differently. This is simply the Beatitudes, Matthew 5:2-12. Listen to these:

“Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek or the gentle, for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied. Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God. Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets...” and we have come back to those men with whom Jesus identified Himself.

The issue here is for us to realize what “great” is in the eyes of God. “Greater works” Jesus said, you will do than I have done. Jesus said the one who offered a cup of water in His name would not lose his reward. Beloved, this is not sentimentality. This is instead reaching for the triumph of goodness over selfishness. This is the contrast with the priest and the Levite on the road who turned away from the beaten [Jew] and then the Samaritan who says, “Here, let me bind up your wounds.” This is the distinction between the person who says “I am too busy, and therefore too important, to take time for you” as opposed to the one who says, “Your needs are my priority.” What Jesus is talking about is the emergence of righteousness in the heart that has already been corrupted because it is fallen, but is now being made into a new creature after the image of Christ. This is the gladness of God in seeing a soul saved away from the power of sin and death and bondage to the prince of the power of the air, just extending a glass of water, only to bless in the name of Jesus. How great a work is that?

I wonder: we have some men who work on the streets as police and sheriffs. I wonder what it would mean to them to see someone they know has been a gang leader and one day to come across that young man and they see him extending his hand to someone else in the name of Jesus just to bless them with a glass of water. What do you think would happen? Is that a great work? That is a great work.

We come to the fourth stage: we were made for fellowship with God. We are the only creatures upon the face of the earth and as far as we know in the entirety of the universe who are capable of communion with God. Angels are not incarnate spirits as we. This is what we read in 2 Peter 1:3-4, *“God’s divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature. . . .”* That is our calling. That is our privilege, and that is the challenge. It is not power, it is not wealth, not any of the vast array of worldly comforts to us that will be valued in heaven, but goodness, righteousness, cleanness, the sheer wonder of a pure heart, and a love which overflows with praise and gladness in the presence of the Father for His glory, the recognition of the majesty of the Son, and the perfection of love in the Holy Spirit. This is what we are made for.

Let us pray: Holy Father, grant that we will have eyes to see and ears to hear and hearts to believe. Grant that we will set aside all the distractions and the lesser things and be devoted to the great things, giving honor and praise and glory to You by doing the works in the world that let others know of Your love. It is, Father, in Jesus’ name that we pray. Amen.

Questions for Understanding and Application:

1. What are some of the special divine actions by which Israel was made to be and preserved as a unique nation?
2. Why did Jesus present himself as a prophet rather than as the Son of God?
3. What important truth did Jesus emphasize by citing Psalm 82:6? How might that truth have helped sincere Jews in understanding and accepting Jesus? What lesson is there for us in this Psalm?
4. What are the “ordinary” means of grace and how are these described in 2 Timothy 2:15 and 3:16-17?
5. What do you think Jesus meant by “greater works” in John 14:12? Who can do these?
6. According to the message today, what is our usual difficulty in understanding John 14:13?
7. Why do people desire power, especially supernatural or “extraordinary” power?
8. Jesus’ work on the cross is unique. Other than that, in what sort of works did the Apostle Paul go beyond Jesus?
9. Under what conditions was Paul strong? (See 2 Cor. 12:7-10)
10. What is “great” in the eyes of God and how does 2 Corinthians 12:7-10 help us see this?
11. What are the great qualities or attributes God’s grace perfects in us and why is this a great work?