

01/30/11

Living Life Together by Selecting the Right God

- Is there a difference in the amount of time you put into selecting a can of cream corn compared to the process you would go through in buying a new car?...
- let's say that your wife asks you to pick up some items from the store on the way home and one of the things is a can of cream corn...
 - so you finally find the section of the shelves that has creamed corn...and there's half a dozen brands from which to choose...how long will it take you to make that decision?...
 - and I'm sure there will be a person here who would say that you would read the nutrition information on each label, and then compare the actual cost per ounce of each brand, and then look through this packet of coupons, and consult Consumer reports on your I-phone for their latest comparison of cream corn brands, and then of course pray about it for a while, and call your mom, and ask a few people in the aisle for their opinion...I'm really not talking to you right now...
 - I'm talking to normal people – and more specifically, the guys who are here (which is another way of saying the same thing)...
 - but guys, how long would it take you to make that decision?...seconds, right?...
 - in fact, for most of us, if we actually made it home with creamed corn instead of regular sweet corn...we would view that as a shopping accomplishment worthy of serious rewards...
 - but compare that to buying a new car...or a different car...
 - we would all agree, all hoo-haa aside...that's a different issue...
 - we'd be a lot more careful about that one...we'd spend more time...
 - we would get as much information as possible...
 - we would comparison shop...probably spend some time on the internet— maybe even let a couple of dealers offer bids...all of that...
 - but we would not pull the trigger on that decision until we were fairly sure we got that one right...
- why?...because the benefits of getting it right and the consequences of getting it wrong are far more significant...
 - anyone who spent more time on their corn decision than they did on their car decision is just _____ -- you fill in the blank...
- now, let me ask you this – when it comes to the issue of selecting a God...should that process look more like the corn decision or more like the car decision?...
- because here's the truth...for many people in our culture---they really haven't given much thought to the identity of their god...it's almost like...any old god will do...
- now, to make this just a bit more complicated...there's not just the matter of your confessional god...there's also the issue of your functional god...
- what's the difference?...
 - we all have a confessional god – in other words, the one we say we believe and trust...so if we were given some sort of a doctrinal quiz, we would say – yes, my god is _____...this is who I worship...this is who I believe in...this is who I trust...this is what I'm staking my eternity on, etc.
- but then there's the issue of our functional god...

- for example – you had to make spending decisions this week – what you were going to do with your money and what you weren't going to do...and the choices you made revealed the identity of your god...
- or, perhaps you were faced with a potential worry or fear – how you handled that in the heat of the moment revealed who/what you really trust...the real identity of your functional god...
- or, when you were tempted to do something wrong – that choice was offering all sorts of joy, or pleasure, or power but it also involved clear disobedience to Scripture...if it was a temptation to sin---that's exactly what it was...and how you responded revealed who you truly worship in real time...
- your relationships with other people reveal that...
- the way you handle your anger reveals that...
- your views and choices regarding sexuality reveal that...
- the way you spend your time...how you entertain yourself...how you eat...
- on and on – every choice reveals the identity of your functional god...

- and truthfully – some people give that issue less attention than the selection of a can of creamed corn down at Pay Less...that is just a fact...
- so here's what God does...He comes along the tendency of people to be careless on this issue – and provides all sorts of reasons the help us make the right choice...

- that's what we're going to talk about this morning – **Living Life Together by Selecting the Right God.**
- with that in mind, please open you Bible to Exodus chapter 5...page 43 of the back section of the Bible under the chair in front of you...
- our theme this year is Living Life Together...what does it mean for our church to be a place where it's easy for men and women to feel/be connected...to be more and more of the family of God we read about in Scripture, and that we believe the Lord is building here...
- and we've pointed out that there's at least three components to that...
 - what do we need to do from a church perspective to facilitate that kind of connectedness...
 - and what steps do you need to take to be more connected...
 - and what do you need to do as a person who's part of the church family to help us be easier for others to feel/be connected...
 - so that phrase "together with all the saints" in Ephesians chapter 3 is going to be an important emphasis all through the year for us...

- let me pause for just a moment and ask you this question – what specific steps have you taken so far this year to apply what we've been talking about so far this year?...
- it's amazing how quickly these weeks and months roll by...could you point to any specific way you've tried to act on what we've been studying...
- I know that there are many people who could answer that with a "yes" because of everything that I'm seeing and hearing...
 - there's a lot of talk about having people into one another's homes, or meeting at restaurants or other activities, or being more consistent in praying for brothers and sisters in Christ, or by getting involved in an ABF or other class for the purpose of making new Christian friends...so I know that the answer for some, perhaps many, is yes – but what's the answer for you?
 - now, where are we in our study of Exodus?...last Sunday we looked at the call of Moses...and saw that God delights in revealing Himself to His people...He did that

through the burning bush, and the revelation of His name Jehovah (Yahweh), and the specific instructions He gave Moses and His people...so He delights in people knowing Him, and walking with Him, and calling out to Him...

- we also saw that God is incredibly patient with His people as we learn...Moses had 5 objections to the plan God was revealing and amazingly God worked through each one of them in a way that was filled with grace and lovingkindness...
- and the take away for us as a church family is that Living Life Together as a church is built around a growing knowledge of our God...
 - there's a direct correlation between a church's ability to accomplish God's will for us and the seriousness with which we take this issue...
 - you may recall that delightful verse in the book of Acts where we read... **Acts 4:13 - Now as they observed the confidence of Peter and John and understood that they were uneducated and untrained men, they were amazed, and began to recognize them as having been with Jesus.**
 - How many people would have reason to observe the way we live life together and have to come to the conclusion...they've been with Jesus – the foundation of their relationship is a growing knowledge of God...
- now, please reach down and buckle your seatbelt—because we're about to survey the next 5 chapters together (not read, but survey)...sometimes that's a good way to look at Scripture because you can see the major themes or emphases...
- and let's see what we can learn about **Selecting the Right God...**
- **read Exodus 5:1 – 6:13...**
 - now we're not going to take the time to read the verses this morning, but I'm assuming that most of not all are familiar with what happens next...
 - obviously there's a showdown brewing here...and it may appear that the people of God are losing the battle...
 - but then God orchestrates a series of ten plagues...many if not all of them directly addressing the plethora of false gods the Egyptians worshipped...
 - what's especially instructive is that during the first 5 plagues, the Pharaoh is explicitly said to harden his heart and refuse to repent...
 - but then in the last five plagues, we read the amazing news that God hardened the Pharaoh's heart...
- let's put all of this together and look for **3 characteristics that make the God of the Bible the One you should select to worship.**

I. A God Who is Singular

- we saw last week that this is the point in the history of God's chosen people that the Lord reveals Himself as Jehovah, or Yahweh...
- that was in that critical verse in **Exodus 3:14 - God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM"; and He said, "Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, 'I AM has sent me to you.' "**
- the name Yahweh is the noun form of the verb "to be"...and Bible scholars believe that God chose this particular name to emphasize His self-existence...
 - human beings didn't make Him up...He is who he is...He reveals Himself to man...
- the Jewish people were so concerned about not taking the Lord's name in vain that they substituted the word Yahweh to what we have in our English Bibles as LORD (in all capital letters) to be sure they were showing God the reverence and honor He deserved...

- so any time you see the word LORD in all caps in your Bible – that’s what is being signified...the name Yahweh....that’s the foundation behind God’s promise to be with Moses as he seeks to lead the people out of Egypt and into the promised land...
- so always think of God’s self-existence in tandem with His promise to always be personally present with His people...
- we also often see this name for God used in contexts where a promise or a covenant is being made or referenced...
- God’s self-existence is what qualifies Him to make and keep incredible promises...and there is no other god like that...and that’s...

A. What God’s people needed to know about Him at this point in history.

- remember this – God always gives us the amount of information about Him that He believes we can handle at the time...
- you may recall that Jesus would later tell His disciples – there’s a lot more that I could teach you...but what?...you can’t handle it now...so after I’m resurrected, and your hearts are a whole lot softer than they are right now, I’ll send the Holy Spirit...and He’ll teach you the additional things you need to know, and then guide you to record those words in the book we now call the NT...
- but God gives us the amount of information about Him that He believes we can handle at the time...
- up until Exodus...people like Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph had known God primarily as El Shaddai...the mighty God...that’s who gave Abraham and Sarah a son in their old age...that’s who blessed Isaac and Jacob in marvelous ways....that’s who orchestrated Joseph’s life in a way that preserved the nation through an extended famine...they viewed the Lord as the Most High God...
- that’s why we would have a passage like Genesis 14:19-20 where Abraham wins an incredible battle and is met by a priest named Melchizedek on his way back home, and here’s what Melchizedek did – **Genesis 14:19-20 - He blessed him and said, “Blessed be Abram of God Most High, Possessor of heaven and earth; and blessed be God Most High, Who has delivered your enemies into your hand.”**
- there’s the name I just mentioned – El Shaddai – God Most High...that’s the way God’s people understood Him at the time...
- they knew He was the most powerful God – but there’s no indication that they understood He was the only God...
- the events recorded in this section of the book of Exodus is when God chooses to make that point clear to His people and everyone else in the known world...
- He is a God who is singular...
- so God instructs Moses and Aaron to pay a courtesy call on Pharaoh... **Exodus 5:1- And afterward Moses and Aaron came and said to Pharaoh, “Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, ‘Let My people go that they may celebrate a feast to Me in the wilderness.’ “**
- and how does Pharaoh respond?...**Exodus 5:2 - But Pharaoh said, “Who is the LORD that I should obey His voice to let Israel go? I do not know the LORD, and besides, I will not let Israel go.”**
- did you hear that?...I don’t know Jehovah...making the classic mistake of thinking that my belief determines reality...well, I don’t know Him---therefore He must not exist...
- and remember that Pharaoh was viewed as a god...the incarnate son of Ra and therefore part of their pantheon of gods...
- so if there really was a Jehovah...his power and position would be in jeopardy...unless he was willing to repent and believe...

- that's why in the verses that we read and all through this portion of the book of Exodus...the emphasis is on how God is orchestrating these events so the people may know that Jehovah is the only true God...
 - **Exodus 6:6 - Say, therefore, to the sons of Israel, 'I am the LORD, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will deliver you from their bondage. I will also redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great judgments.**
 - **Exodus 6:7 - Then I will take you for My people, and I will be your God; and you shall know that I am the LORD your God, who brought you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians.**
 - that's a great summary of the purpose of everything we're reading about...and the message would be so clear that even...
 - **Exodus 7:5 - The Egyptians shall know that I am the LORD, when I stretch out My hand on Egypt and bring out the sons of Israel from their midst.**
- and if you say, well, how would the Egyptians come to this conclusion, and how would the people of God be sure?...that was the point of the ten plagues...
- this was a classic showdown between the God of the Bible and the gods of the nations...between monotheism (one God) and polytheism (many gods)...

B. Connection to the ten plagues

- so we read the Lord continuing to emphasize this central point of His uniqueness and singularity...in other words, He's giving men and women the information they need to make a wise choice in the selection of their god...
- so, before the first plague...
 - **Exodus 7:17 - Thus says the LORD, "By this you shall know that I am the LORD: behold, I will strike the water that is in the Nile with the staff that is in my hand, and it will be turned to blood.**
- and before the fourth plague...
 - **Exodus 8:22 - But on that day I will set apart the land of Goshen, where My people are living, so that no swarms of flies will be there, in order that you may know that I, the LORD, am in the midst of the land.**
- and before the last plague...
 - **Exodus 12:12 - ...and against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgments— I am the LORD.**
- that's why after the children of Israel are delivered from Egypt they are taken to the mountain of God and they receive the ten...commandments (because after all, God is...holy...remove your sandals because the ground on which you are standing is holy...) – and what is the first two commandments are...

C. Connection to the ten commandments

- **Exodus 20:3-6 - You shall have no other gods before Me. You shall not make for yourself an idol, or any likeness of what is in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the water under the earth. You shall not worship them or serve them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, on the third and the fourth generations of those who hate Me, but showing lovingkindness to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments.**
- and the fact that the children of Israel finally got that was evident in what they taught their children day in and day out... **Deuteronomy 6:4 - Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD is one!**

- in other words, be sure you are careful in the selection of your God – because there is only one...

D. Connection to you and me.

- after the people learn of God's singularity...and after they are reminded of His holiness through the ten commandments...
- the obvious question becomes – how can people who sin have a relationship with a singular God who is Holy...
- and that's why God instructs Moses to implement a system of sacrifices that point to the One whom the prophets will identify as the coming Messiah who will one day pay the price for the sins of man...and that's why the power of the apostles preaching is centered around this message...
- **Acts 4:10-12 - let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead—by this *name* this man stands here before you in good health. “He is the STONE WHICH WAS REJECTED by you, THE BUILDERS, *but* WHICH BECAME THE CHIEF CORNER *stone*. “And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved.**
- the God whom we worship, whom we adore, whom we serve, and who draws us together as a family...is a God who is singular...
- now, here's the challenge that you and I face...some men and women have not been nearly as careful as they should have been in the selection of their god...they're really not given it the serious contemplation it deserves...
- and that's true in 2 ways...

1. Regarding salvation.

- there will be all sorts of men and women who will walk into this church today, and the truth of the matter is – they are trusting their own good works to get them to heaven...
- they don't need a Savior...and they don't need a Lord...
- and that is why Jesus Christ is not a central part of the way they live every day...
- Paul said...
- **Ephesians 2:8-9 - For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, *it is* the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.**
- and many people have never stopped long enough to consider that without repenting of their sin and admitting their need of a Savior, all the good things they have done are like a pile of filthy rags...they didn't select the right God...

2. Regarding daily life.

- others know Christ as Savior and Lord...but have a long way to go before acting on His singularity each and every day in real life situations...
- here's what Paul said about that...
- **Colossians 3:5 - Therefore consider the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed, which amounts to idolatry.**
- there will be people here this morning whose past week was consumed with greed – why?...because in that series of situations, they selected the wrong god...
- [develop if time...the Lord has given us plenty of reason to believe in His singularity—we have to decide if we agree]

- what else can we learn from this text?...

II. A God Who is Gracious

- there is a clear contrast between the leadership of the Pharaoh, and the leadership of the Lord...

A. Pharaoh

- time after time he is presented as someone who is ruthless and harsh...
- **Exodus 5:6-9 - So the same day Pharaoh commanded the taskmasters over the people and their foremen, saying, "You are no longer to give the people straw to make brick as previously; let them go and gather straw for themselves. "But the quota of bricks which they were making previously, you shall impose on them; you are not to reduce any of it. Because they are lazy, therefore they cry out, 'Let us go and sacrifice to our God.' "Let the labor be heavier on the men, and let them work at it so that they will pay no attention to false words."**
- that's what false gods are like...
- and when they are squeezed and their true identity comes out...they prove themselves to be cruel taskmasters every time...
- Peter said this about the purveyors of false gods...
- **2 Peter 2:18-19 - For speaking out arrogant words of vanity they entice by fleshly desires, by sensuality, those who barely escape from the ones who live in error, promising them freedom while they themselves are slaves of corruption; for by what a man is overcome, by this he is enslaved.**
- you may be here this morning and you're starting to receive all of those credit card bills from Christmas and you could kick yourself for spending money you didn't have without knowing how you would pay for it...
- can I love you enough to suggest this – perhaps it's time to view that as more than an oops...
 - perhaps it's time to get to the heart of the issue...idolatry...the selection of the false god of pleasure, or of your children's approval, or having to look a particular way in the eyes of people...
 - false gods promise a lot and deliver a little...
 - and until you face it for what it really is at the level of the heart, you probably won't change...

B. The God of the Bible

- **Exodus 6:5-7 - Furthermore I have heard the groaning of the sons of Israel, because the Egyptians are holding them in bondage, and I have remembered My covenant. Say, therefore, to the sons of Israel, 'I am the LORD, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will deliver you from their bondage. I will also redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great judgments. Then I will take you for My people, and I will be your God; and you shall know that I am the LORD your God, who brought you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians.**
- Does that remind you of something that Jesus said in the NT?...
- **Matthew 11:29-30 - Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and YOU WILL FIND REST FOR YOUR SOULS. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.**
- that probably also reminds you of another of the ten commandments...the Pharaoh was all about the people being lazy (which wasn't true) and the need to get back to work
- contrast that to one of the commandment that specifically addresses God's desire and provision for our....rest...

- **Exodus 20:8-10 - Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a sabbath of the LORD your God...**

- that theme is developed in even greater detail in the NT as we learn about a kind of daily walk with God that is so sweet and so intimate that it could truly be described with the words like rest and abiding in Him...

- I wonder how many people are here today and exhausted by sin...

- your anger is exhausting you...

- your fear and worries...your financial pressure...the arguments in your family...

- friend, is it possible that you've selected the wrong God?...

- but what about for the person who would say – I don't think I want to decide yet...

- that's exactly what Pharaoh said....which is why it's necessary for us to conclude by saying that He's also...

III. A God Who is Just

A. Pharaoh started the hardening process.

- Ten times we read that Pharaoh chose to harden his heart to the revelation he was receiving...

- **Exodus 8:15 - But when Pharaoh saw that there was relief, he hardened his heart and did not listen to them, as the LORD had said.**

- but eventually we start reading verses that explain that...

B. God completed it.

- **Exodus 10:20 - But the LORD hardened Pharaoh's heart, and he did not let the sons of Israel go.**

- **Hebrews 6:4-6 - For in the case of those who have once been enlightened and have tasted of the heavenly gift and have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, and *then* have fallen away, it is impossible to renew them again to repentance, since they again crucify to themselves the Son of God and put Him to open shame.**