

10-13-24

All In

Ezekiel 36: 24 -28

So, I'm going to visit my sister's children soon. Her oldest is finally getting married, and I get to help officiate the wedding. We're all very excited to attend.

Visiting my nieces and nephews always makes for interesting vacations. I remember one time my brother rented a boat for us to use on a Montana lake, and we promptly got lost getting back home after we landed in a cove that looked like a hundred other ones. Another time my nieces and nephew taught my "innocent" kids to play their favorite pastime: poker and they even tried to teach me.

I politely declined. I wasn't born yesterday, and know when I'm out – smarted by a bunch of homeschoolers! Besides, losing money has never been one of my favorite past times – even if they are just nickels and dimes.

But I had to chuckle to myself as I listened to the rattling of coins and banter around the table, and I quietly wondered if Jesus would be so quick to decline their offer to play. Remember one of the key complaints the Pharisees rendered against Jesus? *"He eats with tax collectors and sinners"* -Mark 2:16.

I'm sure they would have never approved of his playing poker.

But I'm pretty sure Jesus would have accepted their invitation to play - and not just because he'd have the upper hand, being God after all-, but because he'd savor the opportunity to sit across the table from his new found friends, study their faces, look into their eyes, and call their bluff by asking the all-important question that we're genuinely afraid to ask ourselves: Are we all in?

Are we totally committed to following Christ? Are we sold out for Jesus?

Would we, as Peter famously proclaimed, be willing to die for Christ?

What a brutally honest and scary question!

A question we may not dare ask ourselves, for fear of the answer.

Are we willing to give up everything for the sake of loving, serving and following Christ, or would we follow in Peter's initial footsteps who forsook his friend three times before the rooster crowed?

Some will say that this isn't really a fair question to ask since we can't predict how one will respond, given a particular situation.

My critics may well have a point, but isn't it also true that our responses to present real-life situations may be a good indicator of future actions?

For example, when we hear or see God's name being tarnished and trashed in the public arena, are we quick to defend God's character by responding in a godly manner, or do we shrug it off and worry more about what others might think of us if we stood up and professed our faith?

Remember Christ's solemn words recorded in Luke 12:8?

"Whoever acknowledges me before men, the Son of Man will also acknowledge him before the angels of God. But He who disowns me before men will be disowned before the angels of God."

God, in his infinite wisdom, asks us in different ways, this same question again and again in His Word: Are we all in?

Are we 100% committed to following His Son?

Jesus poses that question to us every time we read Mark 12, verse 30, when He responds to the question, *“Of all the commandments, what is the most important one?”*

Jesus replied, *“Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind and with all your strength.”*

Honestly, I think Jesus could have stopped at the end of the first phrase, *“with all your heart”*, and we would’ve gotten the picture:

Jesus is calling us to love, serve, and honor Him with every fiber of our being, but because Jesus is fully aware of our sinful human nature and how it operates – always looking for a loophole to get out from under responsibility- he adds *“soul, mind and strength”* to leave us no doubt:

Our Savior is calling us – more than this - commanding from us complete devotion to Him.

How dare he demand such commitment from us!

We live in an age when almost everyone is highly skeptical, even downright dubious of being a member of anything or following anyone.

We don’t even like cell phone contracts!

This may be why so many who sit in the pews on Sunday morning wouldn’t consider themselves members of any church.

Why?

Because we don’t like the feeling of being a part of something from which we can’t easily extricate ourselves.

We simply don’t like to be tied down. We take comfort in knowing that “exit stage left” is still and always a viable option, especially when things get tough - or get a bit weird.

Remember Jesus' famous teaching in John 6 when he says, *"unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you."*

That sounded weird.

What did Jesus mean?

He certainly wasn't talking about cannibalizing his body, but he was saying that until we believe by faith that Jesus Christ is God's one and only appointed sacrifice for the removal of our sin, we have no future with God.

In other words, until we receive by faith God's solution to our terminal and lethal problem of sin, we have no hope of partaking in eternal life that God freely offers.

Whether the crowd understood this or not is questionable – but their response was never in question. John 6:66 says, *"From this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him."*

Why?

Because Jesus was calling for an **"all in"** decision, and many, if not most, were unwilling to give it.

I'm sure some are thinking, but Pastor, it's not fair to compare a commitment to Christ to a commitment to the church. You're comparing apples to oranges!

Am I?

I wish that were the case, then my message could be so much more light-hearted, but the truth of the matter is that a commitment to God's Son necessitates a commitment to his church.

You can't have one without the other, as is so aptly pointed out by the Apostle Paul in his letter to the Ephesians, where Paul describes the church as Christ's body with Christ being the head.

He even goes further by describing the relationship between Jesus and the church as a marital union between husband and wife. A commitment to Christ demands a commitment to his church, His body.

But you protest! Pastor, the church is so messed up!

You should see the people who attend!

There are some real characters, to put it nicely!

And the preacher's messages, they're confusing, and don't even get me started on the worship: those songs they sing? They're just not my style.

Stop for a minute, and let me translate: So, what you're really saying is, "I'm committed to Christ, but not to His church," that which He loves the dearest and best and gave up His life to create and form.

Listen to yourself! It's completely illogical! It's nonsensical!

It's like saying I'm a vegetarian, and I only eat meat!

Husbands, how many times has your wife said to you, I love you, but I never want to see you again? (Don't answer this out loud.)

It doesn't make any sense, but the sad reality is that many Christians live like this in their relationship to the church!

They think they are committed to God and His purposes, but they've left out the key and most important ingredient:

In Ephesians, Chapter 3 verse 10, the Apostle Paul writes this about the church as it relates to God's purpose for the whole universe:

“His intent [God’s] was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, according to his eternal purpose which he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

What is God’s manifold wisdom?

We, as the Church are the microscope and the telescope through which all must look to see and understand the amazing and marvelous story of our great God.

The church is here to answer the question...

How is He making all things new again by his power and wisdom?

He’s doing it all through through his Son Jesus.

God has chosen the church to tell the story of His Redeeming Love.

How are we doing?

It’s tough to do this when we’re not fully committed to it.

It’s difficult to tell the story of complete sacrificial love and devotion when we’re so far from that ourselves.

No wonder few listen or give heed to the modern church.

Commitment to God and His church requires sacrifice, and I guess we have no more to give.

We’ve sacrificed for our homes.

We’ve sacrificed for our careers.

We’ve sacrificed for our nice cars and our retirement and vacations.

We’ve sacrificed for our children’s future.

We’re all sacrificed out!

We have no more sacrifices to offer God or His church.

Makes sense, doesn't it?

Jesus said it himself, *"Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."*

Wow! What a dilemma we find ourselves in:

On the one hand Jesus says, *"Love God with all your heart,"* and on the other hand our hearts are too full of other stuff to have any room for God, His people or His mission.

What are we to do?

We could wallow in self-pity and fatalism and just give up, and let unbelief and anarchy take over the world.

We could busy ourselves with double the activities, thinking, "this will work", but God will call our bluff.

More activity doesn't equate to greater love for God.

No, our hope rests in the promises of God that are so eloquently spoken about through the prophet Ezekiel in 36:24-28:

"For I will take you out of the nations, I will gather you from all the countries and bring you back into your own land. I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you, your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws."

Are you all in?

We can be all in, because God, through Christ, went “all in” for us.

Think of it! God, the Father, left nothing in reserve when it came to saving mankind. He didn't hold back the Ace of Spades when the salvation of mankind was on the line.

The Bible tells us that He can offer us the wonderful gift possible, the salvation of our souls because of what His Son accomplished on the cross.

The Father's One and Only begotten Son became man and then our Savior when he voluntarily went to the cross to pay the penalty for our sins – past present and future.

Now I know that if you've been attending this church for any length of time, you've heard me speak on this topic on numerous occasions – this all - important truth that Christ's offering of himself paves the way for our salvation.

But the word salvation is no simple word.

It means more than just punching our ticket into heaven when this life is done. It is pregnant with all sorts of meaning that cannot and should not be overlooked.

This is why the Ezekiel passage is so important to us this morning. It paints a rich and colorful picture of what salvation in Christ actually means for us, and even more importantly tells us the all-important truth that our salvation is first and foremost and act of God's glorious grace toward us.

In just these five short verses, the phrase “I will” is repeated seven times!

- I will take you out of the nations.

- I will gather you from all the countries and bring you back into your own land.
- I will sprinkle clean water on you
- I will cleanse you from all your impurities
- I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you
- I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh
- I will put my spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and my laws.

Do you know what this means? It means God is a promise-keeper and that God makes good on his promises!

For though these promises were futuristic in Ezekiel's time they've been accomplished and realized in our day because of the gracious hand of God. And these fulfilled promises are all aspects of our salvation!

I will take you out of the nations. This is God's promise to us that we as Christians have been chosen and set apart to be God's people and to do his will - to be a blessing to the nations!

This is what salvation is all about! Salvation starts now, and if we're saved, we are to bless others! 1 Peter 2:9: *"But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness and into his wonderful light."*

I will bring you back into your own land. Sure, this means bringing the Israelites back to Canaan after 80 years of captivity in Babylon, but it's more than this. It's about God's people finding safety and security and refuge in the family of God because we've become adopted into God's

family and the rights and privileges of God's family have been bestowed upon us – again, another important aspect of our present salvation!

Ephesians 1:4: *"In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ in accordance with his pleasure and will – to the praise of his glorious grace."*

I will sprinkle clean water on you and cleanse you from all impurity.

Salvation means our sins are washed away and we're forgiven.

2 Corinthians 5:21: *"God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."*

In other words, the punishment we deserved for our sins was put upon Jesus so that we can now walk with our head held high and our conscience clear because of Christ's mighty work in our lives.

I will give you a new heart, and put my spirit in you.

Salvation also means new life. New life in the sense that we now have a new standing before our creator. Where once we were under judgment for breaking God's commands and as good as dead, now we have new life because of God's wonderful grace.

Galatians 2: 20: *"I have been crucified with Christ, and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me. "*

I will move you to follow my decrees and laws.

Salvation means we can say no to sin and yes to God. We don't have to live according to the world's schemes any longer. We have a new master and new Lord and he gives us the wisdom and courage and strength and even the desire to walk according to his will.

I know I say this a lot, but I'll say it again. Here's one of my favorite verses in the Bible: 2 Peter 1:3 *"His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises so that you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world."*

Are you all in?

Do you want to participate in the divine nature?

How awesome would that be?

We can, because God went all in and continues to be all in for us.

Amen.