



18 PENTECOST
OCTOBER 11/12, 2014
JOSHUA 24:1-15

FIRST, MARSHALL
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MATTHEW 4:8-10

Practice Makes Perfect??

Dear friends in Christ: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Please join me in prayer: Prepare our hearts, Lord, to receive your Word. Silence in us any voice but your own that in hearing we may believe and in believing we may obey your will revealed to us in Jesus Christ. Amen.

Says Joshua to the people of the promise: *Choose this day whom you will serve...* Joshua is now the leader of the people of God, the people who for the last **40 years** of wandering in the wilderness have been protected, propped up, and provided for by God... *Choose this day whom you will serve...*

Doesn't this seem like an odd thing for Joshua to have to say to **God's people?** I mean, you read that list of God's saving acts, and ya gotta ask: ***what other god is there to serve???***

A professor at seminary blessed us with a great tool when we hit a pot-hole like this while studying the bible. He said, *Pay attention to that pot-hole, you can trust that it's not accidental, that it's there because something about the issue was seriously affecting the faith life of the people.*

So, for example, when the Apostle Paul talks about **LOVE** in I Corinthians 13, (you know that one, right? **anyone** who has been to any **wedding anywhere** – Carolyn’s and mine included – has heard parts of that passage).

When Paul says, *love is patient; love is kind; love is **not** envious or boastful or arrogant or rude...* he’s **not** simply presenting a poem in praise of **L-o-v-e**, **nor** is his heart stirred to sing some syrupy song about the splendor of **L-o-v-e** ...

In fact, he’s addressing a heart-aching, relationship-breaking, enemies-making issue, where *sisters and brothers in Christ* are **not** living to love each other with a **Christ-like love**... Instead, they’re just living to love life **itself**, and they don’t **care** about what happens to their neighbor.

Does that make sense??

OK, so with those glasses on then, take another look
 -at what’s happening with the People of the Promise,
 -at what’s going on in the lives of God’s chosen,
 -at the **quarrel** that has caused Joshua to question the peoples’ commitment to serve God... *Choose this day whom you will serve...*
 What other gods, indeed!

Starting in verse 2, look again at that laundry list of amazing things God has done for the people. Over and over again, God rescues them and provides for them. *And how have the people responded to God's loving care?* Look near the bottom of the page at v. 15 and note how that sentence starts. Says Joshua: **Now if (or since) you are unwilling to serve the Lord, then choose this day whom you will serve...**

The problem, from the very beginning, is that there have always been *other gods* that people are tempted to serve: gods that promise

- much more tangible rewards,
- much more pleasurable benefits,
- much more power in or control over life.

And, unfortunately, it's **still** that way **today**, wouldn't you agree? Such gods may not **look** the same, and certainly don't go by the same **names**, but they're out there eager for us to serve them.

So let's take a few minutes and come up with a **Top Ten List** of *other gods* that people are tempted to serve...you and me included! You've heard, of course, of the seven deadly sins: wrath, greed, sloth, pride, lust, envy, and gluttony. **What are other popular gods that we serve?**

Money	Popularity	Alcohol/Drugs	Self-righteousness
Pleasure	Possessions	Beauty	Revenge

Then, as we saw in the children's sermon, we can never forget the temptation to worship the tyranny of **Life's tiny details**, focusing on all those little *have-to*, *need-to*, *must-do* things that consume our time and energy. And in taking so **much** time to serve them, we find precious **little** left over to work on the important relationships in our lives: with God, with family, with friends, with the stranger who needs our help...

So what's the answer to our dilemma? Well, **some** folks are convinced that it's as simple as the old saying: *Practice makes perfect...* Indeed, Malcolm Gladwell, in his book Outliers, asserts that **any** person can become a master of some talent if they simply devote... **10,000 hours of good practice** to developing that talent.

The trouble is finding **10,000 hours to practice**, right? That's **40 hours a week for 5 years**. Even those of us who work in the **Church** can't come close to finding that much time to practice being God's servant. I guess everyone just has too much to do, too many irons in the fire, too many people to care for to become *servant masters*...

But maybe there **is** some kind of **hope** here, maybe there **is** something we can use. In fact, maybe there's something that we're **already putting to work** that will help us stand shoulder-to-shoulder with Joshua in service to our God.

A blog from an organization called Wisdom Group out of Chicago touches on this conundrum and comes to the same conclusion: the vast **majority** of us will **never** create or find 10,000 hours to become masters at anything.

But then the author makes a **very interesting turn**, wondering what might happen if we looked *at the question in reverse* and asked *Where have we **already logged** 10,000 hours of practice? What is it that we do really well* (right now)? <http://www.wisdomgroup.com/blog/10000-hours-of-practice/>

And **that** got me thinking about our life of faith, particularly about the time that **God** has invested *in us*. Think of Joshua's time line, that story about how God has been with the people of the promise through the centuries – **providing for** and **protecting, teaching** and **guiding, loving** and **leading, helping** and **chiding**.

When you frame the question **that** way, 10,000 hours of practice in living as a child of God is **nothing!** **Many** of us have been doing it for **much** longer than that!

Do we get it wrong sometimes? Absolutely!

Do we worship false gods at others? Dang straight!

Are we aware that we cause God grief and pain when we wander off to check out the popular gods of society? Yes, yes, and yes!

And yet...here you are, and here I am, doing a pretty good job of trying to honor the God who blessed and kept the Israelites, the God who blesses and keeps us.

To help us in that effort, I want you to take a minute, think back over your life, and come up with your **own** litany of how God has blessed and kept you.

What has God done for you and through you?

Who has God put in your life as an anchor, a tie-in, a connection to God's grace?

Who helps you see God as the Giver of all that's good in life?

How does God use you to help others in their walk of faith?

And, finally, for how many years has God been committed to helping you in life?

This is something we can put to work. Take that list of ***how God helped the Israelites***, and the one of ***how God is helping your life***, then **study** them, **meditate** on them, **pray** over them. Let them infuse a sense of gratitude for God's goodness into your spiritual **muscle-memory**.

That's how practice will make perfect in our lives. We are called simply to cling to the promise that God **has been, is, and will be with** us. We are called simply to cling to the promise that God **has been, is, and will be for** us.

Can you dedicate 10,000 hours to becoming a master servant of the Lord? If so, God bless you. If you can't, or won't, then simply reach for the cross. Take hold of that rough-hewn wood and trust that God has already given you all that you need to live, and love, and serve our Lord, all for the sake of Jesus Christ. Amen.