

HOW LONG WILL YOU WAIT?**JOSHUA 18:1-10**

When he was approaching the age of 40, Harold Greenwald faced that fact that his life had been a failure. He worked at a resort hotel in charge of the golf course. He also supervised a group of partially recovered alcoholics. One day a friend dropped by to see him. During the course of their conversation, his friend asked Harold a probing question, "Harold, when are you going to do something? How long will you wait?" Right then and there, Harold Greenwald faced that fact that his life fell far short of its potential. He had a remarkable wife and two great kids. But over the years, he'd held so many awful jobs – more than 60 different jobs. But as a direct result of his friend's question, Harold Greenwald decided to do something. Within one month, he had applied and gotten a good job as an executive in a manufacturing company. Two years after that he decided to become a psychologist. A few years later, Harold Greenwald found himself with a PhD and a full psychoanalytical practice. He wrote a book that sold nearly a million copies. A movie was made based on Harold's book. He was regularly invited to speak about his work and ideas. Within a few years, Harold Greenwald had a very different feeling about himself. The catalyst apparently was a friend who looked him in the eye and asked, "When you are going to do something? How long will you wait?"

Come with me this morning to central Palestine to a place called Shiloh. There before a tent-like structure called the Tabernacle – the place where the Israelites worshipped God -, sat Joshua, their leader. Before him were assembled the leaders of the twelve tribes of Israel. Joshua asked them the same probing, meaningful question Harold Greenwald's friend asked him. Let's read about it just now. The entire Promised Land of Canaan (present day Israel) had been given by God to the Israelites as a gift. After several years, most of the land was now under Israelite control. But, apparently, seven of the twelve tribes had not yet fully claimed their particular geographical areas. God had given them the land. But they hadn't gotten it yet completely. They had inherited the land. But they hadn't fully possessed it yet. There's more than a hint of frustration in Joshua's challenging question, "How long are you going to wait before taking possession of the remaining land the LORD, the God of your ancestors, has given to you?" (Joshua 18:3 NLT)

Throughout this summer message series in the Old Testament book of Joshua, we've observed some parallels between the literal events in that book and our own spiritual lives. For instance, just as the nation of Israel was given a physical, literal inheritance to get – the land of Canaan -, so you and I have been given a spiritual inheritance when we became followers of Jesus. Israel had to learn how to live in the land of blessing called Canaan and we have to learn how to live the abundant life offered to us through Jesus. I'd like to take Joshua's question and target you and me with it today, "How long will you wait to get everything you've been given in and through Jesus? When will you fully engage and do something with what's you've been given spiritually?" So, what exactly have you and I been given in Jesus? Among other things, we've been given...

A LIFE OF WORSHIP

Did you notice something interesting about one of the tribes of Israel when I was reading our text a few minutes ago? The tribe of Levi wasn't given a portion of land as an inheritance. Why not? "The Levites, however, will not receive any allotment of land. Their role as priests of the LORD is their allotment...." (Joshua 18:7 NLT) Earlier in the book of Joshua, we read this interesting verse, "But Moses gave no allotment of land to the tribe of Levi, for the LORD, the God of Israel, had promised that he himself would be their allotment." (Joshua 13:33 NLT) The Levites became the priests for the entire nation of Israel. Their role was to lead and manage the worship of God week in and week out for everyone else. They were the ones who sacrificed the animals on the Tabernacle's altar and later on the Temple's altar. They conducted and led all off the great worship festivals every year. Their life was a life of worship before God. That was their inheritance – not land – but, instead, God Himself.

At first glance, Levites sound like the forerunners of pastors, or worship leaders, or choir directors – men and women who lead worship services for God's people. But when you study the New Testament, you discover that every follower of Jesus is a priest. No one needs to have another human being act as a mediator between himself and God or herself and God. After all, the Bible is quite clear on this matter, "For, there is one God and one Mediator who can reconcile God and humanity—the man Christ Jesus." (1 Tim 2:5 NLT) Every follower of Jesus has direct and immediate access to God. Every believer is called to a life of worship and praise. Every Christian has the privilege of entering into and possessing a growing and developing life of worship. While the worship of God was more or less the province of the Levites in the Old Testament, it is open and available to all of God's people in the New Testament.

Here's something we easily forget. Every human being was created to worship and praise God. It really is our ultimate mission, purpose and goal in life. After all, why do we want to see lost people come to a personal knowledge of Jesus? So that they will worship God. We've heard from some of our missionaries in recent weeks. Why do they and other missionaries spend so much time and energy going overseas to help people learn about Jesus and become His followers? So that lost people will worship God. Every human being was made by God for God. You were made to know, love and worship this amazing Creator God who has revealed Himself as Father. Right there is where you will find the single greatest meaning and purpose for your own life. No follower of Jesus can enjoy a life of spiritual abundance without entering into a life of meaningful worship.

Part and parcel of getting what you've been given is growing in your worship of God. Do you make time during the week to worship God personally? Do you walk into this place on Sundays strongly expecting to meet God in a new, fresh, life-enhancing way? Or do you come more out of sense of obligation, duty and habit? Has it occurred to you that worshipping God is the ultimate reason and purpose for why you're on this planet taking up space? You can worship God on your own and with others. It's not one or the other, but both. Yes, it's an act – something you do or give yourself to - but it's also a lifestyle. It can happen every day and all through the day as you offer up praise to

God, ask for His help in decisions, confess your sins to Him, and enjoy His peace that passes all understanding.

The town or region of Shiloh was apparently located in the very center of Canaan. Until the Temple was built in Jerusalem some 300 years later, Shiloh was where God's people gathered to worship God in the great yearly worship festivals. It occurs to me that Jesus is at the very center of your life and mine – of your worship and mine. Ultimately, worship isn't about what kind of music you like or what kind of building you worship in. No, worship is about recognizing Jesus as the spiritual center of your own life and living out the truth of that relationship in every possible way every day.

Years ago, when a certain wealthy man died, a search was made for his will but none was found. According to the law, the estate was to be divided among several surviving cousins who were the closest relatives of the man. All of the man's personal property was to be converted into cash at a public auction. During the sale, the auctioneer held up a framed photograph, but no one bid on it – not even the cousins. After the sale, a woman approached the auctioneer and asked him if she could purchase the picture for a dollar which was all she had at the time. She explained that the photograph was of the wealthy man's only son. She went on to explain that she'd worked for the family at the same time that the boy had lost his life trying to rescue a drowning person. She had loved and cared for the boy a great deal. The auctioneer accepted the dollar. The woman went home and placed the photograph on a table near her bed. It was then that she noticed a bulge on the back of its frame. She removed the backing and there, to her amazement, was an envelope containing the rich man's will. The enclosed instructions were simple: "I give and bequeath all my possessions to the person who cares enough for my son to cherish this photograph." We get all that God has given – everything - when we cherish His Son, Jesus. When we make Him the object of our worship at the very center of our daily lives. How long will you wait to enter into and fully possess a life of worship? You and I have also been given...

A LIFE OF WORK

The passage we read earlier reminded us that Israel controlled Canaan in the sense that the armies of the original inhabitants had been effectively destroyed or neutralized. And yet significant areas of the Promised Land had never actually been possessed. What did that mean? God wanted the Israelites to drive out completely the original inhabitants, live in their cities, and farm the land. Here's the spiritual parallel to you and me. The moment you put your trust in Jesus for this life and eternity, God gave you this never ending, inexhaustible spiritual inheritance. He forgave all of your sins. He gives you the power to resist temptation. He removes any and all guilt from your life. He sends into you the actual presence of the Holy Spirit – the Third Person of the Trinity - to live in your spirit forever. Through the Holy Spirit, He gives you rich gifts like His peace and His guidance. He endows with spiritual abilities that you can discover and then use in His mission. He invites you to find your part in His mission of bringing spiritually lost people into an eternal relationship with Himself. But all of these demonstrations of what God has given have to be received. You have to go out and

make them yours. It doesn't just happen automatically. No, it takes spiritual work, spiritual effort, and spiritual energy. Yes, it can be hard work at times, but it's also joy-filled work that yields an incredible reward. So, here's the question we need to ask ourselves: How long will you wait before you get to work?

We learn in this chapter that seven of the twelve Israelite tribes had not gotten fully what they'd been given. Why? For whatever reason, they'd become indifferent and lazy. Come to think of it, that was really a lack of gratitude to God. He'd given them this awesome gift, but they'd settled for less than what God wanted them to have. Imagine giving one of your kids a beautiful, new, fully furnished home as a gift on 10 gorgeous acres out in the country. Your child expressed verbal appreciation for your gift, but he or she just never got around to moving into it. There was no effort to mow the lawn, keep up maintenance on the house itself or show any kind of care for this wonderful gift. How would you feel? Wouldn't you begin to doubt your child's gratitude?

God never calls you or me to a life of spiritual laziness or indifference. Instead, He calls us to become co-laborers – co-workers- with Him in building His Kingdom. Over in the New Testament, Paul, the great Christian leader, described his friend Timothy with these words, "He is our brother and God's co-worker in proclaiming the Good News of Christ." (1 Thess 3:2 NIV) To press the metaphor, we are called to work on God's farm, to be laborers on His construction project, to be employees in His company. We are supposed to help Him do stuff. That work He give each of us to do is actually part of that marvelous inheritance – that abundant life in Jesus – that He has given to us. It's part of what we need to claim, to possess, and to get. When you fail to find and do the work God has given you to do, you rob God of His investment in your life and you rob yourself of so much blessing, fulfillment and joy.

So, to what kind of work does God call you and me? The first kind of work is the transformation of your character. That's hard work! God wants us to toss out a lot of junk that prevents us from having the kind of character He desires. There's moral junk, emotional junk, spiritual junk, relational junk, that just needs to get thrown out like so much garbage. No, God doesn't expect you to get rid of all of that character junk at once any more than He expected the people of Israel to boot out all of the Canaanites at once. But He does expect us to work alongside the Holy Spirit – cooperating with Him – so that a complete character transformation eventually takes place in you and me. I think of that verse over in the New Testament, "Work hard to show the results of your salvation, obeying God with deep reverence and fear." (Phil 2:12 NLT)

To what kind of work does God call you and me? The second kind of work is helping to build His Kingdom. The New Testament says a lot about something called spiritual gifts. Every follower of Jesus has at least one – and usually several – Holy Spirit given abilities or talents that can be used to accomplish things for God. Do you know what your personal spiritual gifts happen to be? You might be a leader or a teacher. You might have a gift of wisdom or a gift of encouragement. You might have a phenomenal gift of faith you express through prayer or you might be able to give financially way beyond the tithe. You might have a gift of hospitality or administration; in other words,

you know how to make people feel welcome or you know how to organize and put a plan together. Do you know how the Holy Spirit has gifted you? Are you using those gifts in ministry through this church or out there in the community? If not, here's the question I believe God is asking you today, "How long will you wait?" Getting what you've been given involves living into a life of worship, a life of work, and, also,...

A LIFE OF WITNESS.

God wanted Israel to be unique, different and special among all the other nations in the world. God wanted people from other nations to look at Israel and say, "Wow, so that's what life is like with God and under God!" I'll tell you something truly tragic. Israel, as a nation, wasn't terribly interested in God's expectations for it. In fact, instead of longing to be distinctive and different, Israel longed to be just like all the other nations. Again, there can be an uncomfortable similarity to you and me. God has called every follower of Jesus to a life of witness. People who don't follow Jesus should be able to look at your life and mine and say, "Wow, so that's what life would be like if I decided to follow Jesus and make Him the Lord of my life." Instead, many of us shrink and shy away from that calling. Instead of wanting to be distinctive and different, we just want to kind of blend in and be like everyone else – our friends, the people we work with, or live next door to, or go to school with. We just want to fit in not stick out. But if you're a follower of Jesus, you're supposed to stick out in a good way! God wants to use you as His channel of love and grace to lost people who matter so much to Him and for whom Jesus died and rose again.

To be sure, there are different ways to live out a life of witness. Not many of us are called to be a Billy Graham and conduct mass evangelistic meetings all over the world! But there are aspects of witnessing that every follower of Jesus is called to. First, God wants you and me to pray for specific lost people regularly. There are people who are in your social circles: family, friends, neighbors, and people you work with or go to school with. God will start to put certain, specific people on your heart and mind. Pray for them. Second, as God creates the opportunity, intentionally develop an authentic friendship with every lost person He brings into your life. Sure, wait for God to open the door. But, when He opens the door, walk through it. Don't wait for a non-believer to take the first step. Become that person's friend authentically; in other words, whether or not he or she ever becomes a follower of Jesus. Third, look for opportunities to have several spiritual conversations. Most lost people make many "mini-decisions" before they make the big decision to become a follower of Jesus. Fourth, when God creates the moment, share the Gospel verbally and invite him or her to become a follower of Jesus. Fifth, help a new follower of Jesus understand his or her decision and become a "self-feeder" spiritually. Friends, I firmly believe God has put you in the family that you are in, the neighborhood you live in, the school you attend, the workplace you are in, because in those places, He wants you to live a life of witness.

Here's something else I firmly believe. I've made it no secret that we need to become a turnaround church. Has that happened yet? In my estimation, not yet. There are some very promising signs, but right here is the real secret to becoming a turnaround church.

It's not having a great building. It's not having just the right kind of worship music however you might define that. It's not having every program and ministry known to mankind. It's not having enough paid staff to do all the ministry. It's about an increasing number of us in this room hearing the Holy Spirit ask us deep in our hearts, "How long will you wait? How long will you wait before you start to live a life of witness?" It's about hearing that question and answering, "Lord, I'll start today."

Years ago when many people travelled by train to go long distances and horse carriages were still common, a tragedy occurred at a railroad crossing out in the country one night. A carriage containing an entire family was struck by an oncoming train and all the people in it were killed. There was an investigation and the man – he was called the gateman - assigned to watch that particular crossing and warn travelers of any approaching trains was examined. They asked him if he was at the crossing that night as he was supposed to be. Yes, he was. "Did you know the train was coming?" "Yes, it was right on time." "Did you take your lantern and go out to meet it, as you were supposed to do?" the examiner asked. (This was before the day of electrification and light bulbs.) "Yes," said the gateman. That was pretty much the heart of the examination, so after a few more routine inquiries the investigation was dropped. The conclusion was that it had been just one of those unfortunate accidents for which there was no known cause.

Years went by and the gateman who'd been questioned had long since retired and was close to death himself. As he lay on his bed, he was heard moaning over and over again, "Oh, those poor people. Oh, those poor people." A friend who was there asked him what he was talking about. The retired gateman explained that it was the accident at the railroad crossing many years before. His friend tried to reassure the gateman, "But there was a careful investigation into all of that. You were completely exonerated." The gateman said, "But there's one question they didn't ask me. They didn't ask me if my lantern was lit." His lantern had not been lit and the death of the family in the carriage was the tragic result.

If you are a follower of Jesus today – you've trusted in Him as your Savior and Lord – for this life and for eternity, that's your lantern, so to speak. But the question needs to be asked, "Is it lit?" Does anyone know you're a follower of Jesus? Do the lost people in your life who are moving all too quickly towards a collision with eternal tragedy know what's about to happen to them? Do you have a lantern? Is your lantern lit? How long will you wait?