

## Monday, November 2, 2009

"I am willing."

These are the three very important words that Jesus spoke to the leper in Mark 1:41. In this passage we get a clear look into the heart of God as revealed in Jesus. God's heart is for His world. God is willing to save.

As I write that, I realize how many things God gets blamed for. I think about how many times I have been asked the question, "Why did God allow that?"

This world is hell bound by choice. Nowhere else in God's amazingly expansive creation is there disobedience to God except on earth and in the spirit world allied to this earth. God's will is being done perfectly everywhere else in the universe. That is why Jesus, in His example of prayer, taught us to pray, "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven" in Matthew 6:10. In all of creation only man has been made in the image of God and given a free will to choose. People are designed and created to be in a relationship with the Creator, because of the love He longs for them to accept.

God has a great heart of love that yearns for every one of His created people to have the effects of sin removed. He is a passionate God who loves us deeply. He loves us so deeply that He gave us the free will to choose to love Him. He did not and does not force that upon us. God so loves the world. He has purposed not to give to us against our wills. Think about that statement for just a moment.

God will not give against your will. If you choose to reject His love offer, He will not force it on you. If you choose to misunderstand Him and His actions, He will not force you to see things His way. He will take your accusations and respond by offering His love.

This is not a love of the will. This is a real, emotional love that God has for you and for every single person. That love is displayed in His willingness to save. Most do not struggle with the fact that God has the power to save. Rather, they struggle with whether or not God is willing. They misunderstand the depth of His love.

God's love is immeasurable—so much so that it defines who He is. God is love 1 John 5:16. That love is displayed in the action He took to rescue the people He loves so much from the devastating effects of sin. The cross is an eternal reminder of the depth of the love of God. Instead of asking why God allowed something, the better question is, "Why did He pay the penalty for the sins that caused it?"

The answer is this: because He loves you and me deeply and passionately and he longs to win your heart.

**Family Discussion Question:** *Do I understand the depth of God's love for me? Has He won my heart?*

## Tuesday, November 3, 2009

The leper of Mark 1 is an example of disobedient response. He is not the first to respond in disobedience, nor will he be the last.

Please read John 14. Many times this chapter is read thinking about the future home that Christ is preparing. Could I ask that you please read the chapter thinking about loving obedience?

What is the first thing you notice in this chapter? What motivates obedience? See it there in verse 1? Trust. Jesus tells His disciples to trust in Him as God. He is trustworthy. As He speaks to them in this chapter, He tells them of the things that make Him worthy of trust and in so doing reveals to us what will make us worthy of trust.

Can Jesus trust you?

Isn't that an interesting question?

What makes Jesus worthy of trust? The love He has for the Father, demonstrated in His obedience. See the last verse of the chapter? "I do *exactly* what the Father has commanded Me."

Why does Jesus make this point? Perhaps a clue is found in the verse just prior to this one. "the prince of this world is coming. *He has no hold on me.*"

We cannot stand against Satan if we give him even just a little hold in our life. Our love for God plays out naturally in obedience that keeps Satan from having a hold on us. Does Satan have a hold on you? He had a hold on the leper - even after he was healed.

Jesus reveals to His beloved disciples that obedience is an indicator of love. Read verses 15, 21, 23, and 24 of John 14.

Is obedience a big deal? In a way, the answer is yes, but really, what Jesus is saying here is that love is the big deal.

The world desperately needs selfless love. What a void of love there is. All the pain, all the anguish, all the bitterness, abuse and rejection would be eliminated if the selfless love of God were to cover the earth. That is how a life of loving obedience can raise the standard in the world.

The world will not know our God of love if we are not obeying Him. In the last verse Jesus tells them that the world learns that Jesus loves God because He obeys. It is the same for us. Obedience flows from a heart of love. Jesus knows you will need help with this. That is why you have the Spirit. See verse 16? The Spirit will help you with this forever!

The world needs to see us obeying the God we love. They are obeying the God they love.

**Family Discussion Question:** *Does my obedience flow from a heart that Jesus has won?*

## Wednesday, November 4, 2009

We understand that there is a battle raging for the hearts of people. In fact, people are the battlefield. It is in the will of people that the battle is fought. It is in your heart and mine that the battle is fought because our heart is the seat of our affection and our will.

We see that battle so clearly displayed in the garden. Let's look at that together today. Please read Genesis 2:4-3:24. More than likely, we have all heard or read about this before. Let's look at it again together. There are Adam and Eve fresh from the hand of God; unscarred, unstained and like God. Life has come to him from the very breath of God and they are body and spirit.

They are in a love relationship with each other and with God. It is a pure love that is shared - a love with no selfishness. This type of true love, and only this type, is life - it is our deepest need. It is as God designed. Part of that design - of being in His image - is that people should have a free will to choose who would have their heart.

There they are - God and mankind in the persons of Adam and Eve in perfect relationship and fellowship; walking side by side in friendship and partnership. God has given dominion of the earth to man (Gen 1:26, 28); He and man are ruling together. God has entrusted man with sovereign power over his own choice.

Here then, is the moment of great opportunity for mankind, the opportunity to use that power to take the relationship to an even deeper level.

The tree of knowledge of good and evil is really the tree of choice. The choice involved one thing - obedience. All good is wrapped up in staying in the warm touch of loving obedience to God. All evil is found in the coldest rejection of disobedience. To disobey or to fail to obey is the core of all evil.

Whichever choice was made - whatever way they would use their God-like sovereign will, the knowledge would come. It was not the eating of the fruit that brought the knowledge; it was the response to the command. Either choice would have brought the knowledge of good and evil. If they had chosen to obey, they would have known good by choosing it, and evil by rejecting it. Knowledge comes through experience. Adam and Eve came to know evil intimately by choosing it and came to know good through the rejection of disobedience. They gave away their heart.

The choice had to be made. The opportunity for increased intimacy with the Lover of their souls required the exercising of their free will. They chose intimacy with the opponent and in doing so, affected the actions of God. That was the result of their choice instead.

**Family Discussion Question:** *What choice do I make when I face the opportunities that will draw me closer to God?*

Thursday, November 5, 2009

Yesterday we looked at the choice made in the garden. Let's look there just a little more because there is more we can learn. We each have been given this free will to do as we choose. Choosing obedience brings life and choosing disobedience brings death - each choice you make (Romans 6:21, 23; Deuteronomy 30:11-20). To choose disobedience is to step away from the hand of love and into the hand of hatred - that hand belongs to Satan.

Something else happened at the tree of choice. Mankind gave dominion of the earth to Satan. The act of disobedience was actually a double act; in choosing to disobey God, Adam and Eve chose to obey Satan. Satan was seeking to get dominion of the earth. The choice of Adam and Eve facilitated that. Their choice of allegiance to Satan transferred the dominion to him. That is why Jesus refers to Satan as the "prince of this world". (John 12:31, 14:30).

In order for God to bring the world back to the original dominion, Jesus had to come as a man.

The earth had been given to a man, it had been given away by a man, so it must be won back by man. And so it was. Jesus came as God's Man and defeated Satan by rising victorious from the grave, so that he no longer is the ruler of the earth. He has been defeated.

But here is the rub. Satan does not acknowledge that he has been defeated. He does not surrender his dominion unless he must, he is supported in his ambitions by the disobedient choices of people, and he really believes that he can make his possession of the earth permanent. So what? What does all of that have to do with me?

I am free to make the choice to obey. God *will not* get into my heart without my consent and Satan *cannot* get into my heart without my consent.

Each opportunity I have to obey or disobey is actually my tree of choice. No one makes me do either. It used to frustrate my kids when I would tell them that no one can make you mad - it is your choice. No one makes you sin. No one makes you obey. It is your choice. Here is the truth; most of us don't take the time to realize the ramifications of our choices. We don't stop to realize that each choice of disobedience leaves the world that much more in Satan's control and demonstrates our allegiance to him. We don't realize that embracing disobedience is embracing evil. We don't realize that the result is that the actions of God need to change.

He has chosen not to give against our wills. We do not change His purpose, but we do affect the actions - remember the leper? (Mark 1:45)

**Family Discussion Question:** *Do I truly believe that my acts of disobedience change the actions of God?*

Friday, November 6, 2009

The big idea for this week is that choosing my "instead" results in a change in the way the mission of God is carried out.

In the studies this week, I have tried to show us that God is a God of love who is yearning to restore a lost world to Himself. That is His mission. He saves us for the purpose of joining Him in that mission.

Satan is trying to show the world that God does not love them. That is his mission. It started in the garden. You can almost hear him say to Eve, "If God really loved you; He would let you eat that fruit." He has been telling the same lies over and over. He tells us that we cannot be good enough for God to love so don't bother trying. He tells us that we need to do more so we do more stuff we think is right—just like the leper. He tells us that God does not really love us, because if He did, He would give us this or that. He tells us that little things done wrong are not a big deal. Every time we buy those lies, we embrace his mission and abandon God's. We draw people away from God.

He has been defeated. He has no power in our lives unless we give it to him. If we are to raise the standard in the world, we need to be people on mission with God. We love Him because He first loved us. God is love. To be an accurate reflection of Him requires that love identifies us.

Would you please read the book of 1John. If possible read it a couple of times over the weekend.

John referred to himself as the disciple Jesus loved. Because John realized how much Jesus loved him and because he realized how precious that love was, he wanted everyone to see that love manifest itself in the obedience of those who know Jesus. Look at 1John 5:3-5.

It is not about what you do, it is about who you are. As one who has given yourself fully to Christ, you are a child of the King. You are the object of His love. You are one of those He has chosen to be a vessel of His Spirit. You are on a mission with Him to seek and save the lost by demonstrating loving obedience that flows from a heart that is truly alive because it is held by the warm hand of a loving Savior. You strive to have your will perfectly in line with His so that His will can be done on earth as it is in Heaven, because His will is carried out through yours.

**Family Discussion Question:** *Am I on mission with God?*



Pastor Chuck Cervenka

November 2 - 6, 2009



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Highway 50 & Harris Road  
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www.calvarycommunity.net