

Covenant UMC Bible Study Notes-- November 6, 2017

Joshua 24:1-3a, 14

“Throw away the gods which your fathers served.” Some translations say “put away,” but there is power in the words “throw away.”

One often sees the words “as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.”

This covenant made at Shechem was a new covenant for that time and place. It was the God the Israelites chose to serve.

This was a vow: God takes care of you, and you worship God. People often refuse to see the justice part; they see only the love of God. Over and over in the Old Testament, the Israelites turned away and served other gods. What God gets angry about is people not having mercy on each other. Jesus said that God sends his mercy—he sends his rain—on everybody [see Matthew 5:44-45.]

Clothe yourselves with compassion [see Colossians 3:12]. This is followed by the teaching that wives should obey their husbands, and husbands should cherish their wives. We don't always pay attention to the second part. The relationship goes two ways. Similarly, we are to obey God, and God cherishes us.

On a trip to Israel, it was unsettling to look over toward Shechem and see guard stations and barbed wire. It was a weird juxtaposition.

The doctrine of election can be dangerous if we see it as a matter of privilege instead of responsibility. All people are God's elect. We will be judged by the question: Did you take care of others?

Psalm 78:1-7

We are to hand this on to the next generation. The young have only us as witnesses.

The Bible contains stories about how God dealt with different people. We can learn from them. Don't make it a matter of rules. Don't put a hedge around God.

I Thessalonians 4:13-18

This suggests God's continuing care.

The dead rising from their graves is not a comforting image!

God brings us back—reinvigorating us.

We need to overcome our tendency to be feral. Cats don't believe in mercy. They don't understand that we sometimes want to pet another cat. My brain does not want to give my food or clothes to anyone else. God puts his spirit in us so we can learn to love and share. Status is important to cats, and guarding their territory. I don't want that to be my nature.

Matthew 25:1-13

Jesus told this story toward the end of his ministry.

Religious people sometimes miss the oil that is produced by the everyday stuff of life. We need continual replenishment.

This is one of the “sorting” parables. All started out to the party, but some didn’t make it. Life is going on all around us, but there is a sorting coming. We in the church think we’re doing well. But God asks, “What did you do with the opportunities I gave you?” We will not be judged on our doctrine or history, but by the question “What did you do?”

The church has a budget and a Lord to serve. How do we balance these?
We live in fear that there isn’t enough.

Overview

Choice.

Choose this day whom you will serve. This day (the day the covenant was made), but also *this* day (today, every day).

Choosing makes us accountable to one another and to God. Obey and be cherished.

Stay awake to opportunities.

Instead of thinking of the covenant as involving a punishing God, we can recognize that there are consequences to our bad choices.

We don’t need to fear God.

A foundation in God enables us to be at peace regardless of what is going on around us.