

FIVE FORKS BRETHREN IN CHRIST CHURCH
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SCRIPTURE: *Joshua 1-6*

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SERMON: *“Living For What Matters Most”*

(Acknowledgement to Luke Keefer Jr. and his book Everything Necessary as the primary source material for this message.)

Good morning! For those of you who don't know me, I'm Bill, one of the Pastors here at Five Forks, and I'm glad for this opportunity to worship Jesus with you this morning.

As you and I prepare to enter into a new year, we do not know what lies ahead. But because we know that God is with us and He is for us, we prepare to enter into 2020 with hope and expectation, resting on the promises He has made.

I want to begin by sharing briefly with you the fascinating account of how the Israelites came to enter into and occupy what is called The Promised Land. Let me say right up front this is more than a history lesson, as it has definite connections for you and me.

Joshua 1:b-2 ...the LORD said to Joshua son of Nun, Moses aide: “Moses my servant is dead. Now then, you and all these people, get ready to cross the Jordan River into the land I am about to give to them – to the Israelites.”

And so Joshua did two things. First, he called together all of the officers and told them to get the people ready, for in just a few days “we're crossing the Jordan.” Second, he sent two spies to go on ahead and scout out the land, first and foremost a city called Jericho.

The spies entered Jericho and went into the dwelling of a prostitute named Rahab. Now Rahab befriended them, because she had heard stories about the amazing things that God had done. She said that all the people of Jericho were quaking in fear, and asked that when the Israelites came to conquer the city, to spare her life and the lives of her family. The spies promised to do so as long as she did not betray them. The men returned back to camp and reported to Joshua...

Joshua 2:24b “The LORD has surely given the whole land into our hands; all the people are melting in fear because of us.”

Early the next morning the Israelites went to the edge of the Jordan River and set up camp there. After three days...

Joshua 3:5b Joshua told the people, “Consecrate yourselves, for tomorrow the LORD will do amazing things among you.

The following day, some of the priests carried the ark of the covenant – the chest (or box) containing the Ten Commandments – and as soon as these priests stepped into the Jordan River, the LORD caused the water to stop flowing, and the Israelites crossed the Jordan River on dry ground.

Once on the other side, the Israelites began conquering Canaan, which is what the land was called...and the city of Jericho was the first to fall. However Joshua made sure that Rahab and her family were kept safe.

Joshua 6:24 Then they burned the whole city and everything in it, but they put the silver and gold and articles of bronze and iron into the treasury of the LORD’s house.

All of this is found in the first 6 chapters of Joshua, and this chapter ends with these words...

Joshua 6:27 So the LORD was with Joshua, and his fame spread throughout the land.

I'm going to stop right there, but we're going to come back and revisit Joshua and the Israelites in just a bit...because there are going to be some issues that arise...issues that revolve around ***Living For What Matters Most***.

This is what we're going to be talking about this morning, not just for Joshua and the Israelites, but for us as well.

Back in November I led a 5-week Discipleship Class, offered it on both Sunday mornings and Wednesday evenings, and one thing I tried to keep before us was making sure we were serious about discipleship.

It is very easy to say "I believe in God" and "I believe in Jesus"...but the danger comes when we stop there. Belief is good and belief is necessary, but in order to become a disciple – which is exactly what Jesus calls us to be - we must keep going and actually follow Him by walking in obedience to Him.

I want Him to matter more to me than anything else in my life. More than my wife, more than my daughter, more than my ministry, and the many other things that compete for my attention and devotion. And it's quite a challenge.

And so I'd like to begin by first talking about what I see as the main problem, the problem of **Too Many Gods**. Then we'll look at the answer to the problem, that answer being **Consecration**. If you don't know what that word means, you *will* by the end of the morning. Then we'll close with **Three Things That Must Be Understood** if you are committed to discipleship, and Living For What Matters Most.

First...

1. THE PROBLEM: TOO MANY GODS

As I said, in just a few minutes we're going to revisit what is going on with Joshua and the Israelites, but in short, the problem they encountered once they entered into and occupied the promised land was too many gods.

If I asked you what the great sin was for the Israelites throughout the Old Testament, some of you would probably say idol worship, which was rampant throughout the OT. But their great sin wasn't idol worship per se...it wasn't that they rejected God in order to worship other gods, other idols. **Their sin was the worship of God along with several other popular gods of the surrounding culture.**

As followers of Jesus, we find ourselves in a similar boat. It's not that we reject Jesus, it's just that we also embrace other gods that are popular in our current culture.

Some of you are old enough to remember these gadgets called Viewfinders. They looked kind of like plastic binoculars...had a slot on the top that you would drop this cardboard disk down in, and then you'd look through it and see a picture.

You'd see a picture of the same object that was taken from two different points, your right eye would see the object from one angle, your left eye would see the same object taken from a different angle, and it would look like 3D! Wow! 50 years ago this was really fascinating stuff.

Now suppose you looked into the viewfinder but what you saw were two totally different objects...what you would see would be very distorted and give you a headache if you looked long enough.

As followers of Jesus, one of the biggest challenges you and I face is overcoming a distorted vision. **We have one eye on Jesus, and that's good. But we have our other eye on another object or objects that have as much meaning and value in our live as Jesus does.** If not more. And we refuse to let go. Too many gods.

And this is why it's important that as we prepare to enter into a new year, each of us should examine our lives and think about reducing our load. Making the difficult but

necessary choice of putting down some lesser gods, coming to understand the importance of Living For What Matters Most.

Now you and I could make a long list of competing objects...gods that compete for our attention and devotion. As we read the Scriptures, it appears that God breaks these competing gods down into three broad categories...materialism, worldliness, and habitual sin. Each of us will have to look to God to show us the things that are specific to each of our lives, because it will be different things for different people.

Materialism is certainly one that most of us can relate to...when we say we've got to clean the house, we're not talking primarily about dirt, we're talking about clutter. We've got so much stuff we run out of room to keep things. Some of us accumulating as much as finances will allow.

One day Jesus was addressing a crowd of people, talking about how the quality of our life isn't defined by how much we possess.

(Bring up the slide with the Scripture at this point, as I will not read it...Luke 12:15b "...a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.").

It is so tempting to keep one eye on Jesus, and another eye looking on some of our possessions...possessions that hold as much meaning or value as Jesus.

Many of us can also relate to the god which the Scriptures describe as **Worldliness**.

(Bring up the slide with the Scripture at this point, as I will not read it...Romans 12:2a Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.

There is a pattern to this world that is primarily self-centered rather than Jesus centered...the pattern is revealed in how we speak, how we see and treat others, how we spend our money, our entertainment choices.

And as followers of Jesus I don't believe that the answer is separating ourselves from the world...at the same time, we need to recognize that we are to be the ones doing the influencing, and not the ones being influenced and drawn into the patter of this world.

(Share about the book: "I Wish I Had a Green Nose.")

However I imagine all of us find worldliness to be a very strong competitor as we are introduced to trends and fads and it seems to me, to feel this pressure to conform and to fit in and to be accepted. It's a very strong competitor.

The third competing object falls under the category of **Habitual Sin**.

Hebrews 12:1b "...let us throw of everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles.

All of us at various points in our lives have had experience with what we could call "the sin." We found ourselves dealing with one or more specific sins that had become habitual. And whatever it was, whatever it is...we find that it had or has as much meaning and value in our lives as Jesus. Maybe more. *The sin* hinders us, it entangles us even as we have one eye on Jesus.

If we find ourselves having difficulty living as disciples – followers - of Jesus, the problem is almost certainly too many gods...which leads to a distorted vision. One eye on Jesus, and that's good. But the other eye on our possessions, or the ways of this world, or on some sin that just has a hold of us. Too many gods. And let's admit it, we have a very hard time even thinking about letting go. I'm sure that some of you are fighting against it even now, looking for ways to rationalize not letting go of your seashells.

But Luke Keefer Jr, - in his book called *Everything Necessary* - writes that when one, two or all three of these competing gods come together, here are some characteristics we should expect to see in our lives...

1. Quick to Quarrel
2. Weakness in Devotional Life
3. Half-Hearted Worship
4. Grudging Stewardship
5. Little or no witnessing

All of which leads to an absence of spiritual growth and no appetite for the things of God. Believers maybe. But disciples? Followers of Jesus?

So what's the answer? One word:

2. CONSECRATION

One word, and not an often used word to be sure. There is that hymn that opens with these words: "Take my life and let it be consecrated, Lord, to Thee." Even though that might make the word somewhat familiar, we may not really be sure what it is that we mean. To be consecrated means to be set apart, to be dedicated, to be devoted.

To have both eyes on Jesus...where He is what matters most...more than family, more than those things that bring me great pleasure, more than anything.

As Joshua and the Israelites are about to enter into and occupy the land that God has promised them, they are called to consecrate themselves. *Both* eyes on the One True God, and not on the gods that will be all around you. And so this is why, on the banks of the Jordan River,...

Joshua 3:5b Joshua told the people, "Consecrate yourselves, for tomorrow the LORD will do amazing things among you.

Once they entered the land of Canaan, they would face opposition not just in the forms of neighboring gods, but they would also face opposition in battle. And not only were the people called to consecrate themselves – be devoted, dedicated, set apart for God

- everything won in battle was to be consecrated as well, set apart and dedicated to the Lord.

However after taking the city of Jericho, there was a man by the name of Achan who kept some of the dedicated things for himself. Because of his sin, the Israelites went on to suffer an unexpected defeat on the battlefield.

Joshua was in despair, unable to understand why the Lord did not help them in battle, until the Lord told Joshua that one of the Israelites had kept some of the things that were devoted, set apart - consecrated - for the Lord.

The Lord said to Joshua...

Joshua 7:13 “Go, consecrate the people. Tell them, ‘Consecrate yourselves in preparation for tomorrow; for this is that the LORD, the God of Israel says: There are devoted things among you, Israel. You cannot stand against your enemies until you remove them.’”

It's very interesting but very serious what unfolded and how it unfolded. The Lord did not directly reveal to Joshua who among them had kept some of the devoted things for himself. Instead...

Joshua 7:16 Early the next morning Joshua had Israel come forward by tribes, and Judah was chosen. (12 tribes in all, and the descendants of Judah, the 4th of 12 sons of Jacob, had to step forward). The clans of Judah came forward, and the Zerahites were chosen. He had the clan of the Zerahites come forward by families, and Zimri was chosen. Joshua had his family come forward man by man, and Achan, son of Karmi, the son of Zimri, the son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, was chosen.

Achan then confessed that he had taken a robe, silver and gold...and was put to death for his sin, cut off from the promised land.

Unfortunately this was not an isolated incident. For generations that followed, many Israelites, - rather than consecrating themselves by devoting themselves to God – compromised by participating in the customs and worship of neighboring gods, and because of this, missed out on the incredible heritage that God had in store for them.

They failed to Live For What Matters Most.

It shouldn't be surprising that when we look at the One who does matter the most – when we look at Jesus – we see in His life total consecration, totally set apart, devoted, dedicated to God the Father when it came to His attitude – “Thy will be done”.

When it came to His time...He found time, He made time to get alone and talk with His Father.

When it came to the value He placed on material comfort. What material items do we ever read of Jesus possessing?

As we look to be followers of Jesus, we see in Him whole-hearted obedience, an example of true consecration...and as His followers we are called to imitate His example.

Many of us have made a confession of faith and we are sincere when we say we believe in Jesus. But Jesus did not say “*Thy will be done*” and willingly be nailed to a Cross so you and I would simply believe and stop right there.

Like the Israelites, by our genuine confession of faith, we find ourselves entering into this life of promise, this life and relationship that God has for us to experience. And just like when Joshua said, “Consecrate yourselves, for tomorrow the Lord will do amazing things among you”...I call on you to consecrate yourself – just making a total commitment to Jesus as we prepare to enter into a new year.

For as long as you allow material possessions, worldly influences or habitual sin to hold the same meaning or value in your life as Jesus, **“You cannot stand against your enemies until you remove them.”**

I just want you to know, and I’m sure I speak for the rest of the staff when I say, we feel a tremendous responsibility serving here at Five Forks. We take this responsibility very seriously, we want so much to be individually consecrated to God, and we desperately want this for our congregation as a whole.

I know that as one of your pastors and the responsibility we’ve been given to be servant leaders here at Five Forks, that I must be continually examining my heart to see if there is anything that would hinder me personally, and even worse, hinder the work that the Lord intends to do here through us as a congregation.

As a congregation then, let us consecrate ourselves so that in the coming year, we will see God do amazing things among us. In order for this to happen, let me close by sharing with you...

3. THREE THINGS THAT MUST BE UNDERSTOOD

...as you prepare to move forward.

First,...

A. Life as a whole must be consecrated to God

I think we sometimes see our lives consisting of two compartments....the part that belongs to God, and the part that belongs to us.

For instance, some people would see Sunday morning as belonging to the Lord, the rest of the week belongs to us. Some people might see that when it comes to finances, a certain percentage goes to the Lord, the rest belongs to us.

Some might even go so far to think that our outward behavior – what others see - belongs to God...but the whatever lies within our hearts belongs to us.

To be consecrated to the Lord means that all of life – our time, our finances, our heart attitude, everything – is His. Any attempt to set apart some aspects of our life as ours is going to cause us to miss out on what God is looking to do in us individually, and as a congregation.

Second,...

B. We must correctly identify “The Good Life”

We can't allow ourselves to be deceived by everything the world is throwing at us. I haven't watched much TV in the past few years, and so this past month as I've been exposed to some commercials here leading up to Christmas, I'm somewhat taken aback by what seems to me to be a call for almost unlimited consumption and accumulation.

We hear that wealth and possessions and status and popularity are what defines the good life. I don't think that's true.

If we went to bed on Christmas Eve and it's been our nature to be negative, judgmental and critical, we'll most likely find ourselves the same way no matter what we got on Christmas Day. If we went to bed on Christmas Eve content, it's likely we found ourselves content when we went to bed on Christmas night.

The good life is not found in our possessions or our popularity, but is found in being content with whatever we have...and using whatever we have wisely. The good life consists of serving others...working towards healthy relationships...uncluttered schedules...walking in obedience...experiencing God. *This* is the good life.

One more thing that we must understand, and this is very important...

C. What it means to be a “Living” sacrifice.

Romans 12:1 Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices,...

When Jesus calls us to “Follow Me” and we come to understand what following Him really means...if we’re honest we would admit there is a part of us that finds this frightening, because we like to be in control. But for those who are willing to trust Jesus, fully consecrating themselves, they come to discover that any fears that had were unfounded.

God calls us to be a “living” sacrifice. In other words God does not intend to fit you and I into some unnatural type of service which would destroy our spirit and make our lives dreary. Instead, God looks to free up our personalities – the personalities that He Himself has given us - so that we may enjoy doing His will and experience what it is to live.

I don’t know what the coming year holds for me, nor do I know what it holds for our church. But I know that with all the things in life that I love...my wife, my daughter, this church...I know that He matters most, and so I want to live for Him, and I’m asking all of you to do the same.

“Consecrate yourselves, for tomorrow – next year? - the LORD will do amazing things among you.