

UHPC WORSHIP—SEPT. 01, 2019

SERMON TOPIC: "LISTEN, OBEY, AND FOLLOW"

***"Jesus lamented over Jerusalem saying: "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing...! I tell you, your house is left to you and you will not see me until you say, Blessed is the One who comes in the name of the Lord." (Luke 13: 34-35)***

Back in the days of Jeremiah, the weeping prophet, we hear him speaking for God by the Holy Spirit. Jehovah God was asking: "Why have you abandoned Me...The God who delivered you from Egypt, carried you over high mountains, through dessert places, protected you from wild animals, fed you with Manna, and brought you to a blessed and fertile land?" Why have you gone after delusions, idols, and all manner of evil deeds? Even the priests, leaders, and rulers have gone after Baal, a false god. God accused His people of forsaking Him the true, loving, kind, and living God, and for choosing to go to a broken cistern that cannot even hold water. Therefore, God said He would give them over to their own devices." Jehovah God called Israel to LISTEN TO HIS WORD! Listen-- for there was to be a pronouncement against them for their wrong-doing. They should be horrified at what God was about to say and do. NOT ONLY SHOULD THEY LISTEN, BUT THEY WERE TO OBEY, AND THEY WERE TO CHANGE COURSE AND RETURN TO FOLLOW THE WAYS OF THE LORD THEIR GOD.

As if to strengthen the message, we hear Asaph in Psalm 81 pleading for God to the people to turn away from alien gods and return to the True and Living God who gave them water out of the rock (DOES ANY OF THIS SOUND FAMILIAR TO ANY OF US AND OUR CURRENT NATIONAL SITUATIONS?)-- THEN THE PSALMIST WROTE: **"But my people would not listen or obey." They were stubborn, stiff-necked, and hard-hearted. They had made up their minds to go their own way.** SO, GOD GAVE THEM UP TO GO AFTER THEIR OWN EVIL HEARTS AND WILFULL DEVICES. **This is not a good place to be in our relationship with our Creator.** When people press the hand of God to let go of them, they can only end up in a bad place. It truly hurts the heart of God to know what they would experience. It grieved the heart of God so that the LORD lamented: "IF MY PEOPLE WOULD ONLY LISTEN TO ME AND FOLLOW MY PATHS, I WOULD FIGHT FOR THEM AGAINST THEIR ENEMIES AND STRIKE THEIR FOES THAT THEY WOULD BE DOOMED AND DESTROYED FOR ETERNITY."

Please note that God did not leave His people, but God's people had rejected the God they knew to be constant and consistent with them through their tough times. They had become haughty, arrogant, selfish, brutish to one another, dishonest in their business dealings, idol worshippers, and much more. Hence, they pushed God far away from themselves. This is why we hear Jesus teaching a crowd about hospitality and humility. As usual the enemies of Jesus were watching Him closely to try and trap Him in some form of violation of the Law. So, on a Sabbath Day, Jesus was going to dine with a leading Pharisee at his house when they began to be critical of His socializing with this man. But Jesus used the opportunity to teach them how to behave. They were not to be HAUGHTY, ARROGANT, AND PRIDEFUL. But when invited to a banquet, they should not exalt themselves to the highest seat. Instead they should take the lower seat so that the host might move them higher. For it is better to be promoted to a higher place than to be asked to take a lower place. He also taught them about being hospitable to the poor. They were to invite the poor to their events and not just those close relatives and friends who are rich. For the poor cannot give back gifts or return the favor. Therefore, God will reward us on the Last Day of the Resurrection for our obedience, kindness, and generosity. ***I pause here to share a recent experience I had just a few days ago when I went to Jamaica for a few days of a kind of working vacation. I stayed at my late mother's house. It so happened that most, if not all the T.V.'s in the community were out of service and the radio reception was very poor. So, basically all I had was my Bible, prayer, and worship songs. As it turned out, two women from the neighborhood stayed with me at night. One of them was never baptized. So, each night when we had Bible studies and Prayer meetings, the Holy Spirit was preparing her for a very special moment. (I was unaware of her spiritual condition at this time.) On the night before I was to return to the U.S. she agreed to be baptized. We arranged to do it in the bathtub in my late mother's home. I had carried Communion elements with me and for the first time in her life, she received Holy Communion. She was anointed with oil, and prayed over her. The next door neighbor bore witness, and I wrote her a note testifying to the fact that this was done by me and noted my ordination credentials etc. Using the experience of Phillip and the Ethiopian Eunuch: "Here is water; what's to prevent me from being baptized?" This house was not a formal church, but there was water and she wanted to be baptized. This made my visit home complete. We sang songs and prayed etc. This was a poor woman who seemed very far from the "refinement" of most "churchy" people. But God met her in this situation and gave her the greatest gift of all: SALVATION... FULL AND FREE!*** I continue to keep her in prayer that God will lead, guide, protect and complete the work God has begun and bring it to fruition in beautiful way. "D" was listening. She obeyed, and I trust that she will now follow through until eternity.

THESE TEACHINGS OF JESUS ARE NOT JUST FOR LISTENING, BUT FOR OBEYING, APPLYING, AND FOR FOLLOWING as we are learning to walk this Christian journey. By the help of God, we are to build them into our lives until they become second nature and automatic in our planning and social events. FOR GOD IS CONCERNED ABOUT ALL ASPECTS OF OUR LIVES AND ABOUT THE MESSAGES THAT WE SEND TO THOSE WHO ARE WATCHING US.

For the most part, we tend to invite our close friends, relatives, and neighbors. Not many people go out of their way to include the humble and the poor. But Jesus taught that those who humble themselves will be exalted and those who exalt themselves will be abased. THERE ARE SOME OTHER THINGS THAT WE ARE INSTRUCTED TO DO IN THE BOOK OF HEBREWS 13: ... HERE ARE SOME OF THEM:

--Keep our lives free from the LOVE OF MONEY, for it is the root of all manner of evil.

--Let there be mutual affection and love for one another

--Show hospitality to strangers for by so doing we might entertain angels unawares.

--Have compassion and show mercy to those in prison and for those who are being tortured.

--Respect and honor the marriage bed and keep it undefiled, for God will judge the fornicators and adulterers.

--Learn to be content with what you have for God has promised never to leave us nor to forsake us. Therefore, we can say: "God is our Helper."

--Remember your leaders who speak the Word of God to you and imitate their way of life.

--Remember that Christ Jesus is trustworthy. He never changes. Therefore, offer sacrifices of praise unto the Father through Him.

--Share with others for this is pleasing to God.

These instructions flow throughout the Bible from the Old Testament, to the Psalms, to New Testament Gospel, and Epistle. We are inclined to think that it all goes without saying. But today, we are being urged and reminded to pay attention to these seemingly small things. The Scripture tells us that it is the "little foxes that spoil the vine." Sometimes we might become neglectful, a little careless, or even forgetful about the things that matter to God and to our Christian witness. The more we ignore what seems like small infarctions, the larger they tend

to grow and the more dangerous and damaging they can become. So, let us pull back, look at the things that some of us have been justifying, ignoring, or excusing as o.k. or --not too damaging. Let us consider our ways and listen to the Word of God calling us to check ourselves and not to be stubborn in our ways; for after a while, the LORD might give us up to our own devices and willful ways. AND THAT COULD BE VERY SERIOUS. As children of the Most High God, we are expected to bear witness of the God to whom we belong. As a part of the Chosen People of God, ...the Church... the Body of Christ, we are to train ourselves to learn God's ways, to obey God's word, and to live our lives following the paths of righteousness. If we stumble, we are invited to return, repent, and be restored to Grace. Let us not take lightly the small things that seem not to matter. They matter to Jehovah God who is Holy. I urge us to examine ourselves and to return to that place where we are gathered and hidden under the wings of God like mother hen gathers her brood. Our arms are too short to box with God. While the mercy of God is still outstretched to us, let us run into Him and be saved. YES, LISTENING IS GOOD. OBEYING IS EVEN BETTER. BUT FOLLOWING IS MOST CRITICAL.

I pray for a spiritual, emotional, and mental adjustment in all our lives that we will be bolstered in our journey here, now, and for eternity. May Jehovah God in Christ Jesus and the Holy Spirit sustain and secure us in right standing as we live our lives as open letters of God's Love in a dying, hungry, and thirsty world. LORD, JEHOVAH GOD, HELP US TO BE ALL THAT YOU CALLED US TO BE. WE RECEIVE ALL THESE AND MORE, FOR IT IS IN THE NAME OF CHRIST JESUS WE LIFT OUR PRAYERS AND REQUEST. Help us Lord, to walk worthy of You and to follow Your ways, that we might become light and salt in a world in need of Your Salvation, abundant and eternal life.

SONG: I Want To Walk Worthy

AMEN.