

- I. Write on our Hearts; Sunday, Sunday, July 20, 2014
(Sunnyslope)

Psalm 19:14

May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be
pleasing in your sight, O LORD, my Rock and my Redeemer.

- A. "Good morning, church!"
- B. This last Friday I had the honor and privilege to participate in the annual "Pastor's Day" at Double K Christian Retreat Center up in the Cascades near Eason
1. This is a new event, started only last year
 2. The traditional annual Family Camp runs up through Thursday
 3. Then on Friday the pastors and church delegates from the PNA are invited to spend the day together
 - a) We conduct the annual business meeting
 - b) And we also get to listen to some wonderful speakers and learn about things that are going on both internationally and more locally here in the PNA
 4. This year, we had a special keynote speaker: Jim Lyon
 - a) Jim Lyon is the new General Director of the Church of God, Anderson
 - b) He's been in this role almost 1 year now, so still very new
 - c) Jim spoke about the struggles of his new role, in where the Church of God movement is now, and the challenges and opportunities we have before us

- C. One of Jim's key points was that the context into which the Church of God now exists is quite a bit different than the context into which we were born in the 1800s
1. When the Church of God was formed, the United States (and really much of the evangelical Christianized world at that time) was highly denominationalized
 - a) In other words: There were highly entrenched camps of Christians at odds with each other, separated by denomination
 - b) That has all but completely changed now
 - c) Ecumenicalism has been growing and is at an all-time high
 - d) With only a few and rare exceptions, most Christians don't care what denomination other Christians belong to
 2. When the Church of God formed, one of its strongest tenants was to promote the teachings around sanctification
 - a) At the time, Christians typically didn't consider sanctification to be all that important
 - b) People understood salvation, but not sanctification
 - c) But now, today, society generally doesn't understand even the relevance of salvation
 3. In the 1800s, whether you were a believer or not, whether you grew up in a Christian home or not...
 - a) ...you knew most of the Bible stories
 - b) You knew the true story the Ark and Noah

- c) Today, most people have very little understanding of anything from the Bible except for what they see in movies like Noah epic
 - d) A movie that has virtually nothing to do with the true Bible story except for the fact that there's a guy named Noah and he builds a boat
 - 4. Even in the church today, the Christian church across the United States, Bible knowledge is at an all-time historic low
- D. As Jim was speaking, he pointed out that the Church of God did a great service in the mission of Christianity in the 1800s by addressing the problems of that age
- 1. However, today, we are losing our fidelity because as a movement, we are still focusing our efforts to solve the problems of the 1800s instead of the problems of the 2000s
 - 2. Jim made a point that we need to let go of many of our "this is how we've always done it" tropes and embrace new paths to address the current problems our society faces
 - a) We've been focused on maintaining the "hows" of the past we've lost sight of the "whats" and "whys"
 - b) Jim gave as an example the moving the annual Church of God conference from Anderson to Oklahoma City
 - (1) There are no direct flights to Anderson (only to an airport over an hour's drive away)
 - (2) There are not enough hotels in Anderson to accommodate everyone
 - (3) Oklahoma City has none of these problems

(4) And yet there was bitter resistance to moving to Oklahoma City (but only from people who didn't attend)

3. Jim also pointed out that we in the Church of God need to solve our problem of congregational isolationism
4. We today compared to where the movement was in the 1800s: We have the same Bible, the same God, the same truths, and the same goals and mission
5. But we need to embrace different ways to achieve that mission

E. As I was listening at Double K on Friday, 2 key ideas or concepts kept repeating themselves to me:

1. We need to be less independent islands
2. We need to do more with the Bible

II. And it's funny, a coincidence, or perhaps Providence that Jim was saying these things at that time because I had come to the Pastor's Day equipped to convince a few of my fellow pastors that we should start a Church of God Bible Quizzing program

A. Now what is Bible Quizzing?

1. Bible Quizzing, is a friendly competition between teams of 3 to 5 players (or "quizzers") of any age and any background
2. Quizzers memorize parts of the Bible (as defined by the particular quizzing season)
3. And then the teams compete by answering questions based on the material
4. The program promotes Bible memorization, Christian fellowship, and honorable sportsmanship

B. It may sound crazy at first, but the impact of Bible Quizzing is profoundly positive

1. At the heart of Quizzing is a belief in the power of Holy Scripture
 2. The Bible can and does change lives in profound and miraculous ways
 3. As powerful as simply reading Scripture can be, it is many orders of magnitude more life-changing when memorized
 4. Through Bible Quizzing, people of all ages and backgrounds write God's Word on their hearts
 5. And all those involved in the program see the visible evidence of the application of God's Word in the lifestyle of each participant
- C. This notion of memorizing the Bible being described as "writing God's Word on our hearts" comes from a very famous passage from Deuteronomy

Deuteronomy 6:5-7

⁵Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. ⁶These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. ⁷Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up.

1. I had written an introduction to Bible Quizzing document of several pages that explained how Quizzing works and why it is so valuable a program
 - a) I was passing copies of this introduction out to a few key pastors of churches in the Puget Sound area
 - b) And at the top of this document, I began by quoting these 3 verses
2. I think this is a mission statement, a directive that Quizzing addresses
 - a) We are called to heed God's commandments
 - b) But more than that, we need to carry them on our hearts (not just on the printed page)

- c) We need to impress them on our children
- d) We need to talk about God's commandments when we sit at home or when we're out about in the world

- 3. It's difficult to do that without having the commandments (the wisdom of Scripture) memorized (or "written on our hearts")

III. I'd like to look at the whole of Deuteronomy chapter 6 today...

- A. ...because I think herein we can see what I believe should be the mission of Church of God in our present day
 - 1. We no longer need to fight a battle against denominationalism
 - 2. While we need to continue to teach the doctrine of sanctification through the Holy Spirit, that is no longer the biggest problem we face in our modern, post-Christian, secularized world
 - 3. Instead, I think we need to go back to Deuteronomy chapter 6 and recognize that we live in a world that no longer has any notion of the relevance of the commandments of God
- B. Deuteronomy chapter 6 is a powerful chapter used often by Christ and the Jews
 - 1. The "Shema" is a saying recited by Jews in every synagogue service
 - a) It is key to the Jewish (and Christian) faiths
 - b) The "Shema" is verse 4

Deuteronomy 6:4

Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one.

- 2. The Jewish and Christian faiths are defined in their belief in monotheism

- a) This verse is used to support this belief
 - b) There is one God, one Truth, one Lord
3. But even more, this verse almost subconsciously points to the centrality and totality of God
- a) There is only one God because God is everything, everywhere, in all, and through all
 - b) God is complete
 - c) There is no need for anything additional
 - d) Therefore, God's wisdom (which is in part contained in Scripture) is all we need
- C. Let's look a bit farther down in the text, starting at verse 13

Deuteronomy 6:13-16

¹³Fear the Lord your God, serve him only and take your oaths in his name. ¹⁴Do not follow other gods, the gods of the peoples around you; ¹⁵for the Lord your God, who is among you, is a jealous God and his anger will burn against you, and he will destroy you from the face of the land. ¹⁶Do not put the Lord your God to the test as you did at Massah.

Deuteronomy 6:17-19

¹⁷Be sure to keep the commands of the Lord your God and the stipulations and decrees he has given you. ¹⁸Do what is right and good in the Lord's sight, so that it may go well with you and you may go in and take over the good land the Lord promised on oath to your ancestors, ¹⁹thrusting out all your enemies before you, as the Lord said.

- 1. Notice here that there is a direct connection between following God's commandments and things going "well with you"
- 2. There is a direct correlation between submission to God and having a blessed life
- 3. Does that mean if we follow God we will encounter no trials or problems?

- a) No, not at all
 - b) Because even in verse 19 we see that the Israelites would have to at least face their enemies
4. Rather, God promises here (and many other places in Scripture) that if we submit to Him, He will bless us
 5. If we abandon God, He will not bless us
 6. In a world where we see more and more people becoming ambivalent to God..
 7. ...is it no wonder that we see a society that is being blessed by God less and less?
- D. Looking at the chapter in context gives us even more insight into this connection
1. The context of this passage is the Book of Deuteronomy which was delivered by Moses (except the last chapter) to Israel at the end of his life
 - a) It is written in an ancient form of a treaty
 - b) In this type of treaty, the Lord of the covenant spelled out the conditions of the treaty and the rewards for faithfulness and punishment for faithlessness
 - c) What was promised by the Lord and what was expected of the servant was clearly spelled out
 2. In this treaty, God shows his faithfulness to the treaty by reminding Israel of His undeserved goodness and faithfulness to Israel in spite of Israel's disobedience
 - a) God through Moses reminds them of His great and undeserved deliverance of Israel from Egyptian bondage

- (1) If problems should arise in the future to Israel, they could be assured that the problem rested on their faithlessness and not God's
- (2) Their previous record in Egypt and the wilderness showed how faithless Israel had previously been
- (3) They had suffered greatly as a result of their lack of faith

b) The necessity of the whole book of Deuteronomy was a warning to the current generation to be obedient to the covenant or else suffer a similar fate as their fathers in the wilderness

- (1) They were going to enter into the land which God had promised Abraham
- (2) God was going to remain faithful to his promise which He gave to Abraham
- (3) So long as Israel was faithful to the conditions of the treaty of Deuteronomy, all would be well
- (4) The enemy would be driven out and the people blessed
- (5) But if they disobeyed, there would be dire consequences

IV. In our world today, I see our society falling away from God, forgetting the covenants He has made with us

A. I see a pattern emerging:

1. Increasing ignorance of the Bible
2. Decreasing awareness of the relevance of a life in submission to God
3. Increase separation from God

4. Decreased optimism, blessings, and prosperity
- B. Looking at Deuteronomy 6, we can see the causal relationship, the connection between these things
 - C. And so as true Christians, I think we should see clearly our purpose, our calling, and our mission for the modern, increasingly secular world
 1. First, we need to take verse 6 seriously; we need to write God's commandments on our hearts
 - a) Not just read our Bibles
 - b) But in fact commit verses to memory
 - c) And don't you dare say that you can't memorize
 - d) Because with God all things are possible
 - e) And I strongly believe (and I have evidence to support my belief) that if anyone makes a genuine effort to memorize Scripture and calls on God for aid, memorization can and will happen
 2. Next, we need to impress God's commands on our children
 - a) But let's take that verse and expand on the meaning of the word "children"
 - b) It would be too easy to say that the children are our own only
 - c) But I would like to remind us that as Christians, we are brothers and sisters in Christ
 - d) In the world church, our children are Christians young in their faith, not necessarily young in their age
 - e) As Christians, I believe we are called to impress upon other Christians, all those who profess a belief in Jesus, the commandments of God

- f) Meaning, we should be teaching, equipping, training, and encouraging toward righteousness
- 3. And third, we need to write God's commands on the doorframes of our houses
 - a) We could take this literally, putting up signs in our houses and on our doors that indicate our Christian faith
 - b) But we know from Scripture that our bodies are the temples of the Holy Spirit
 - c) Within us the Holy Spirit dwells; our bodies are the house of the Holy Spirit
 - d) And so to write God's commands on our houses is to live lives that are so obviously governed by our submission to God that it would be as if we had a giant sign across our chest indicating our allegiance to God
- D. This week, I challenge each and every one of us to find a verse or two from Scripture and commit it to memory
 - 1. Give it a genuine try
 - 2. Don't claim you can't and use that as an excuse not to try
 - 3. Pray to God and ask for His help
 - 4. Then commit just one or two verses to memory
- E. This week, I challenge each and every one of us to find someone who isn't in this church and encourage that person to commit just one or two verses to memory
- F. I believe that from these two small, seemingly insignificant acts, we will see God's blessing
- G. And may God continue to bless us richly
- H. Amen