

Total Surrender
August 23, 2009
John 6:60 – 69

Imagine if you would a place; a place set aside in terms of geography but rather moderate with respect to its population. What sort of environment would this be? Would this be a culture of conformity or individualism; of order or chaos? Would society function without flaw or would there be a constant struggle for power.

Without continuing to be too specific, let's accept that paradise, especially under the conditions mentioned before, just simply doesn't exist. Therefore, our community would not be flaws, it challenges and the occasional disappointment. Simply based on the sheer number of individuals which occupy this place, we would expect a variety of cultural influences and social patterns. Each person would bring with them their own experiences and beliefs; their own expectations and bigotries; their own level of what they find acceptable and what they will not tolerate. All these characteristics are meshed together into one rather confined geographical area consisting of a limited number of people.

So where is the place? Do you have a specific location in mind? What about a time period? Does your place exist in the past, the present or the future?

In our Old Testament reading today, we heard about the days of Joshua. His rule over a not so stable Israel was coming to an end. His

people were a small group which found themselves in a sea of different tribes and cultures – all in the confines of the Middle East.

During Joshua's reign, Israel did not find themselves at the forefront of cultural influence or direction. Some of their practices seemed odd and out of place to those around them. They had abandoned a polytheistic way of life for the worship of one God; one Creator; one Lord!

In time, as we all do, the people of Israel had their beliefs tested and challenged. Those who still lived according to the Pagan ways and traditions were continually pressuring them to compromise and conform their beliefs to theirs. Keep in mind that the pressure exerted on them was not on the level of a little peer pressure amongst friends or acquaintances. Many of those making demands were far more powerful and prosperous than the Israelites. The people of Israel began to waffle under these pressures and Joshua became increasingly aware of their wavering.

During this time, Joshua – In Hebrew Jeshua – is preparing to step down from his leadership position with the Israelite Nation and decides that he can no longer turn a blind eye to their practices. Joshua challenged them by asking them starkly, "Look, are you going to serve the Lord or not?" We know that the Bible teaches us that all throughout history, the Israelites had bounced back and forth as a nation between being totally committed to God and straying away from His will. Here again, they were beginning to stray,

and Joshua wanted to call them on it. Joshua needed to know and more importantly, the Israelites needed to know, who they were going to serve.

“If you decide to serve the Lord,” Joshua tells them, “then there will be *no* compromise! It will either be His way – all the way – or no way at all. Look around you! There are plenty of choices to choose from – Egyptian Religion, Amorite Religion . . . pick one! But know this, as for me and my family? We are going to serve the Lord! You? You pick!

Whether inspired by Joshua’s words of dedication or by the Spirit of God acting on their hearts, the people declared, “We choose the Lord!”

“Really, You choose the Lord?”

“Yes, we choose the Lord.”

“Alright, then start living like it. Live completely and sold out to Him.”

“Yes,” the people of Israel declared, “We will be completely devoted.”

Now, fast-forwarding many years into the future of this Nation, we find a second group; same ancestry, same geographic location. Here we find a small band of followers gathered around their teacher. The region is strongly under the influence of the Roman Empire and has become a hot spot of cultural diversity. Again, various religious beliefs and practices are sought to reconcile their disparate and contrary systems through syncretism, that is by the melding of various schools of thought. Their ability to synchronize these belief systems into a single religious practice is done with such perfection that it is difficult to tell them apart. Only those most deeply

rooted in their Jewish heritage could ever have hoped to glimpse any distinction.

Here amongst these people we again find another person names *Jeshua*. In English, we call Him Jesus. We find Jesus in the sixth chapter of John standing before His people and once again calling on them to put Him, to put God, at the center of their existence. . .

“Eat Me up.”

“Drink Me in.”

“Consume me.”

“I am your true food and drink!”

“I am the Bread of Life.”

“I am the Bread that gives Life.”

“Come to Me and you will no longer hunger or thirst.”

“You must pick. You must choose.”

“But know this, I Am the only One Who can give you life forever.”

Here within the writing of John, the word of Jesus echoes that of Joshua; do not compromise, be fully devoted. Live complete and sold out to Him, or don't bother at all. You pick!

The message from Jesus speaks directly to the practices of the Roman Empire. Rome applauded diversity. While in and of itself, their inclusive practices are commendable, there is no room for their pluralism when it comes to true relationship and reconciliation. The act of heaping up religion,

one on top of another, and validating them all is the type of diversity that promises to destroy a community and to destroy a nation.

Now listen, this is where we as a 21st Century people get it all wrong. Jesus does not condemn diversity or condemn acceptance. In fact, He encourages it. He shows us that when He speaks to the woman at the well. He demonstrates acceptance when He refrains from chastising the woman who pushed her way through the crowd just to touch the Hem of His garment. Early in chapter six (6) of the book of John, we read about Jesus' feeding the 5,000 (+) people in the wilderness with five (5) barley loaves and a few fish. This is not the only account of Jesus performing such a miracle. In Mark 8, we are told that He once again feeds a different crowd in the same way.

What's the difference? Why do we need to know of both accounts? To answer this, we need to recognize that the two groups were made up of two entirely different groups. The first account was a crowd comprised of Jews, while the second group is made up of Gentiles. Jesus accepts us for who we are; our backgrounds, our experiences and our diversity. He loves us *all* just the same. He loved the Gentile enough to offer them the same Bread of Life that He offered to the Jews and today He offers us that same love and same Bread that gives Life.

What Jesus doesn't say is that there is more than one loaf to choose from and still be fed forever. He doesn't say to bake your own bread and

that will suffice. Rather He says, "I Am the Bread of Life." If we are to eat of this bread then we must choose to accept it when we are called and we must make that choice with full devotion.

Jesuha – Jesus said, there is "No compromise," when it comes to our relationship with Him. "It is my way or no way. I am not **A** path to inner peace. I am not **A** source of inspiration and hope." Jesus said, "I am **THE** source of life and of all these things. It is me or nothing!"

So of course everyone gets the excited about God and everyone decided to follow Jesus. Right? Wrong! A lot of those who surrounded Jesus heard this teaching and said, "That's hard to swallow. We don't think we can buy into that. We don't think structuring a denomination on reconciliation and relationship is what we want. We don't think we want to invest our time, our talents or our finances into a community of Christian Churches unless we are guaranteed a tangible return on our investments. We'd really like to surrender or all, but his form of surrender just isn't what we thought it was when we entered into a covenant agreement with you, Lord. We're outta here." So one by one, they turned and walked away.

Jesus watched them go and there in the midst of what was a great gathering remained a faithful few. As Jesus began to push them and to test their devotion, one of those remaining, named Peter, responded with amazing insight. "Lord, to whom *can* we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and know that you are the Holy One of God."

There was simply no other option for Simon Peter and his band of brothers. They were 100% committed. To them, Jesus IS and FOREVER will be life. Period.

This brings us to today's scripture reading contributed by the Apostle Paul. Many preachers have used Paul's words concerning marriage to fill a few Sunday morning sermons and to promote heterosexism. That is, many take Paul's words as material to support their stance on "protecting the definition of marriage," or to justify their beliefs about a woman's place in the home. Paul's words here are much more than fuel for social debate. Paul isn't speaking to the definition of marriage as between one man and one woman as much as he is speaking to commitment. Paul is talking about a life – long relationship of mutual service and submission; each to be with the other forever.

Paul says, "You know, that whole business of marriage and all those marriages that stick it out despite their hardships? Those are really pointing to the relationship between Christ and His people."

No let me make one thing clear here. Committed does not involve being run over, abused, being taken advantage of or manipulated. No man or woman has the right to take control over your life and to make you "less than" you are in the sight of God. If you are in a relationship that is hindering you from being all that God has called you to be, then get out, get focused and surrender your all to Him.

Where is your commitment with Jesus today? Are you more committed to football than prayer? Would you rather be at the lake than amongst a community of faith? Does work keep you from the family God gave you to love? (I have to admit that one is as much for me as for anyone. It is bad when the pastor steps on his own toes.) Does spending money on your wants keep you from giving back to God? I'm not talking about your needs; I'm talking about your wants. We may *want* to eat at Longhorn's every night but we do not *need* to do so in order to provide food for ourselves and our family. Does your desire to fit in with friends and colleagues keep you from identifying openly with Jesus?

Jesus has asked us for a commitment. He asks us to be faithful to Him as He is faithful to us – in the good times and in the bad.

Today He comes to offer to us, as God has always offered, a choice; the choice to live with Him, in His care and under His love, or to live without Him and without the peace, joy and strength that only a relationship with Him offers.

Today, these scriptures have called me to take account of my own relationship with Christ and to look deep at my own level of surrender and commitment to His call. So friends gathered here in the name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ I ask, "Won't you do the same?" Amen!

