

## The Rhythm of Life with God – Joshua 22:1-6

Sermon – Pastor Joe Davis

Union Baptist Church – 4/15/2018

### I. INTRODUCTION

Will you read out loud with me the passage of Scripture up on the screen, Psalm 19:7-11?

***7 The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul; the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple; 8 the precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes; 9 the fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever; the rules of the Lord are true, and righteous altogether. 10 More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and drippings of the honeycomb. 11 Moreover, by them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward.***

Do you see any benefits to knowing God through his Word and learning to actually obey what it says and put it into practice? It's how we can revive our souls. It can make even simple people wise. It's the path to lasting joy in our hearts. It enables us to finally see things clearly, like putting on a pair of glasses when we're virtually blind without them. It's good and pure and we can feel good about it, and it has benefits that last far beyond this short life we're living here on earth. It's the only sure path to knowing absolute truth and discerning good from evil.

Furthermore, if you had an enormous pile of gold and jewels and great riches and you had the choice to have all of it as your own **OR** to have intimate relationship with God and understanding of his Word, you would be infinitely better off to choose God and his Word. Its value is so far beyond even the greatest riches and possessions this world has to offer, that we would be incredibly foolish and shortsighted to choose anything else. And did you notice that in keeping and living God's Word we find something that can be found nowhere else in the world: the ability to know ahead of time whether a choice is good or bad for us and whether it will lead to our harm or contribute to our good. Through God's

Word we are warned in advance, so we don't have to make all the painful mistakes and bad choices so many people in the world are making today.

And if that's still not enough to convince you of the value of living God's Word, these verses tell us that when we actually put it into practice and live its principles, there is great reward...both naturally built-in rewards and added-on rewards from the greatest Gift-Giver in the universe. Are you convinced yet of the value of God's Word and of learning to follow God wholeheartedly? I hope so. This is why I get up here every week and spend time with you digesting, thinking about, and applying God's Word to our lives today. Because I believe in its infinitely priceless value and that it contains everything we need for life and godliness and the experiencing of enduring joy. And today, as we return to the book of Joshua, we're going to see Joshua advising a group of God's people to build their lives upon this same view of the incomprehensible value of living God's Word.

But before we read the passage this morning - Joshua 22, verses 1 through 6 – let's briefly get up to speed on the context. If you'll remember, Joshua and the Israelites are gathered together at the town of Shiloh. The Lord has finally brought rest to the Promised Land and Joshua has just finished allotting the full extent of the land to the various tribes. The whole land is described as subdued before the people of Israel, but many of the tribes still need to complete the job of taking full possession with continued trust in God's power.

At this point, Joshua turns his attention to the tribes of Reuben, Gad and the half tribe of Manasseh. You may remember that these 2 ½ tribes had previously requested from Moses to receive their inheritance on the east side of the Jordan River, because it was perfect land for livestock and they had lots of livestock. Moses had granted their request on one condition: that before settling down in their land and taking full possession of it, they must fight alongside the other tribes to take the land on the west side of the Jordan, the land of Canaan. When that had happened, and only then, would they be free to return to their own land.

So as we read our passage today, that's the background we need. Let's read now verses 1 through 6 of Joshua chapter 22:

**1 At that time Joshua summoned the Reubenites and the Gadites and the half-tribe of Manasseh, 2 and said to them, "You have kept all that Moses the servant of the Lord commanded you and have obeyed my voice in all that I have commanded you. 3 You have not forsaken your brothers these many days, down to this day, but have been careful to keep the charge of the Lord your God. 4 And now the Lord your God has given rest to your brothers, as he promised them. Therefore turn and go to your tents in the land where your possession lies, which Moses the servant of the Lord gave you on the other side of the Jordan.**

**5 Only be very careful to observe the commandment and the law that Moses the servant of the Lord commanded you, to love the Lord your God, and to walk in all his ways and to keep his commandments and to cling to him and to serve him with all your heart and with all your soul." 6 So Joshua blessed them and sent them away, and they went to their tents.**

May the Lord bless the reading of his Word and enable us to understand it and apply it to our lives today.

## **II. THE COMMENDATION AND THE REWARD (Vs. 1 to 4)**

Let's begin with verses 1 through 4, which I've labeled in your sermon notes: *The Commendation and the Reward*. We see here that Joshua was well aware of the promise these 2 ½ tribes had previously made to Moses. In fact, as they had first prepared to cross the Jordan River just after Moses died, one of the first things Joshua did was remind them of their promise and tell them the time had come to fulfill it. And now, years later, they had proven faithful to the promise they'd made, fighting courageously alongside their brothers to conquer the full Promised Land. So here at Shiloh, immediately following the division of the land of Canaan, Joshua summoned Reuben, Gad and the half tribe of Manasseh to appear before him, and then proceeded to commend them for their obedience and faithfulness and release them to return to their own land.

As we look at Joshua's honoring of these 2 ½ tribes, we find that he commended or complimented them for 4 things: 1) They had fully kept all the promises they had made to Moses; 2) They had fully obeyed Joshua in all that he had commanded them; 3) They had not deserted their brothers even though the

battle for the Promised Land had taken many years; and 4) They had been careful to fulfill the mission God had given them. In short, the valiant warriors of these tribes had wholeheartedly followed the Lord in full obedience to him and his appointed leaders, and they had been faithful to keep their promises and accomplish the mission God had given them. Now it was time for them to be honored and rewarded for their faithfulness.

As we think a little more deeply about the commendation Joshua gave here, several things stand out. First, notice the 3 characteristics of their obedience and faithfulness: *careful, complete and enduring*. They were *careful*. They took great care and paid close attention to what God was asking them to do and they made sure to do it his way and not their own. Their obedience and faithfulness was also *complete*. They didn't take shortcuts or obey halfway, but instead concerned themselves with following every part of God's instructions. And finally, their obedience and faithfulness was also *enduring*. In other words, it lasted over time. Their eyes were fixed on the goal of accomplishing the charge God had given them and until it was complete they continued to walk on in full obedience and faithfulness.

This is the kind of obedience and faithfulness God grows in his children when they're ready and willing to follow him wholeheartedly. *It's careful, complete and endures for the long haul*. Not a flash-in-the-pan, dramatic, attention-grabbing explosion of obedience followed by a dead season of despair and back-sliding, but a steady, patient, careful pursuit of God and enduring commitment to doing life his way, even when we don't feel like it.

Secondly, as we think about Joshua's commendation to these tribes we notice a strong *relational focus*. All that Joshua was commending them for related to their interaction with other people and with God. They kept what *Moses* had commanded them. They fully obeyed *Joshua*. They didn't desert *their brothers*. And they carefully kept the charge of *God*. Do you think relationships and how we treat other people are important to God? How about operating in humility toward each other and obeying those God has put in authority over us? How about sacrificing ourselves and our comforts for the good of our brothers and sisters in Christ and to accomplish God's mission of bringing others into relationship with him? God is always leading us as his children to work for healthy

relationships and look out for the good of others. If we follow him, that's where he leads.

And thirdly, Joshua's commendation reveals that God had given these tribes a mission to accomplish. He had a purpose for them and a job for them to do as his servants, and even after they had completed this temporary mission of fighting alongside their brothers to take the Promised Land, God still had an enduring, lifelong purpose for their lives as his servants, one they would only be able to accomplish as they stayed in rhythm with him and lived his Word.

Well, there's one man in Scripture who really knew well how to live this way. And he appears no less than 5 times in the passage we're studying today. His name was Moses. And if you've been paying attention through our study of Joshua, you may have noticed that the name, Moses, rarely appears by itself. There's almost always another phrase attached to it. You see, the most important thing about Moses was apparently quite obvious to those who knew him, because in the book of Joshua, at least, it's almost always tagged onto his name. That happens 3 times, in fact, just in the 9 verses we're studying today.

What defined Moses and affected every aspect of his life and mission was this: *His understanding that he was **the servant of the Lord***. He wasn't Moses, the great and awesome; or Moses, the miracle-worker; or Moses, the super hero; or Moses, the Wise; or Moses, the CEO of Israel, Inc. He was simply Moses, the servant of the Lord. This was one reason Moses was so effective and powerful in accomplishing the mission God had given him. His identity was all wrapped up in simply being *the servant of the Lord*. Is that how we view ourselves? What freedom that would give us from trying to prove ourselves to others or be successful in the world's eyes or validate ourselves by our achievements. In that identity there's built-in humility and God-focus and peace, and there's great power and fruitfulness when that's simply who we're seeking to be in our lives...*the servant of the Lord*.

This is how the warriors from these 2 ½ tribes had been functioning for these many years of taking the Promised Land, and it was why Joshua was giving them such a glowing commendation. They had been living their lives as God's servants, knowing him and his purposes and acting like him in the way they related to others...keeping their promises, operating in submission to the lines of authority,

and sacrificing themselves for the good of their brothers. And now it was time for their great reward. God had brought rest to their brothers and now he was releasing them to enjoy the fruits of their faithfulness. After commending them for their obedience and faithfulness, he said:

***And now the Lord your God has given rest to your brothers, as he promised them. Therefore turn and go to your tents in the land where your possession lies, which Moses the servant of the Lord gave you on the other side of the Jordan.***

You've fulfilled your commitment and kept your promises, now go in freedom and joy to take possession of the land God has graciously given to you. ***But wait***, there's one more absolutely essential thing you'll need to remember as you go back to your own land.

### **III. THE ADVICE AND THE BLESSING (Vs. 5 to 6)**

And this brings us to verses 5 and 6, which I've labeled in your notes: *The Advice and the Blessing*. Let's read verses 5 and 6 again:

***5 Only be very careful to observe the commandment and the law that Moses the servant of the Lord commanded you, to love the Lord your God, and to walk in all his ways and to keep his commandments and to cling to him and to serve him with all your heart and with all your soul." 6 So Joshua blessed them and sent them away, and they went to their tents.***

I like to call this Joshua's *Big Only*. As Joshua considered the most important thing he wanted to share with these 2 ½ tribes as they parted from the rest of Israel and returned to dwell in their own land, this was it. It was his *Big Only*, and it reveals for us what I'd like to call *the Rhythm of Life with God*.

**Joshua says:** *Wait a minute. Before you leave there's one thing you need to know that will keep you on track with the faithfulness you've shown over these many years. If you'll remember this one thing, you'll do well in your land and be able to accomplish the mission God has given you. Are you ready? Here it is in one simple phrase: BE VERY CAREFUL TO OBSERVE THE COMMANDMENT AND THE LAW*

*THAT MOSES THE SERVANT OF THE LORD COMMANDED YOU. If you get that right, everything else will fall into place and you'll be blessed greatly in all you do.*

There are 3 elements to this simple instruction from Joshua. First, there's *the commandment and the law*...a small book of detailed instructions and guidelines about living life with God as his people, now nicely tied together and reviewed in the book of the Bible we call Deuteronomy. They needed to know what's in there, review it frequently, and share it with their children, because it was their simple, but essential guidebook to life as God's chosen people. Secondly, they needed *to observe* what's in that book. They not only needed to know what's in there, but they also needed to live their lives and make their choices based on what it says. And finally, they needed to *be very careful* in understanding and following what it said. They weren't to treat it lightly or find reasons for not doing it.

Joshua's instructions weren't complicated, were they? Know the book and be careful to do what it says. But here's where we often get off track and miss the heart and the deeper purpose of why God had given the Israelites the commandment and the law in the first place and what it was really about. The very best example and the culmination of the wrong handling of God's commandments and law is found in the Pharisees of Jesus' day, and we still see it happening even here in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. What had happened with the Jewish people over the years, culminating with the scribes and Pharisees, is that they saw in the law simply a list of rules. And if I just keep this list of rules along with some others I've added for fun, I can feel good about myself, others will think I'm spiritual, and God will give me what I want and leave me alone. In other words, God's guidelines about living life in connected relationship with him as his servant became just another way to work for my own desires, my own glory, and my own selfish purposes.

You see, the commandment and the law was really about leading us deeper into relationship with God and living of his purposes. The New Testament says it is our tutor to lead us to Christ. It's always been about leading God's people to find the rhythm of a faithful life connected with the Creator. Joshua made this clear in his *Big Only*, as he went on to describe what life looks like when we are being careful to live out the commandment and the law. And it's so much more than just keeping a list of rules.

So what does it look like according to Joshua? Well, he gives us 5 key elements. Write these down in your notes, because we're going to spend some time on them this morning and you'll want to think about them later. This is the 5-fold way Joshua describes the life of someone who is carefully living out God's guidebook for life:

- 1) Loving the LORD their God;**
- 2) Walking in ALL his ways;**
- 3) Keeping his commandments;**
- 4) Clinging to him OR holding fast to him;**
- 5) Serving him with ALL their heart and with ALL their soul.**

Does that sound like something a little deeper than just keeping a list of rules? Returning to the Pharisees we find that they were only concerned with number three: *an external obedience to a list of commandments*. Living in a love relationship with the Lord, actually walking with him and learning to be like him, clinging to him in dependence and trust in his power, and serving him wholeheartedly for his purposes...none of these things were taking place in the scribes and Pharisees of Jesus' day, whom he described as whitewashed tombs...places of the dead that had been painted up on the outside to conceal the death on the inside.

Now notice how relational each of the 5 elements are. All of them are focused on intimate relationship with God...staying connected with him...in yoke with him, you might say. And don't miss the intensity and the "all-in" attitude of number 5...serving him with ALL your heart and with ALL your soul...in other words, living life with the simple and fully engaged focus of being the servant of the Lord in all things.

But how do we get there? How do we move from being a believer in Christ to a fully engaged and effective disciple and servant of him. Well, the answer is found in the sequence or order of these 5 elements that describe what it looks like to live out God's commandments. First, notice what the sequence is: It goes *from loving, to walking, to keeping, to holding on, to serving*. And, of course, it has to begin with loving, doesn't it? Without the love relationship, everything else is just a dead keeping of a list of rules. But when the foundation and the lifeblood is the experience of God's love and the growing of our love for him, everything else

comes to life and is a natural outflow of that love relationship. And why do we love? *Because he first loved us.* It's that understanding of his deep and personal love for us that begins and sustains everything else from there. If we leave that out or lose it, the rest falls to pieces.

As we work through the rest of this sequence now, the best way I can think to tie it in with real life is by using the experience of Jesus' disciples. I want you to think back from our recent study of the Gospels, how this sequence played out as Jesus' called his first disciples and they began following him. In each case, we find that the disciples first came to an understanding of Jesus' true identity as the Son of God, the Lamb of God who had come with the love mission of taking away their sin and shame. They also each experienced his love and care for them personally and discovered that he actually knew who they were on the inside and still loved them and wanted to spend time with them. This was how they each came into relationship with him and began loving him. They realized who he is and how deeply he loved them and they began to love him in return, so much so that they left everything to follow him.

Now as they began to love Jesus and recognize him as everything they wanted in life, they began to do what? Walk with him. They became his disciples with the intention of following him around and learning from him how to live life. In other words they began to walk in all his ways. He was their Rabbi, their teacher, and they modeled their lives after him.

As they walked with Jesus, he gave them more instructions and commandments and understanding about how to live life connected with God in his kingdom. And because they loved him and wanted to be like him and trusted everything he said was for their good, they listened to what he said and actually put it into practice. And in fact, Jesus later told them that this is how they would express their love back to him...by keeping his commandments.

Now we're to part 4 of the sequence, if you're still with me, which is clinging to him or holding fast to him. Whereas many people stopped following Jesus or even turned against him when his teachings got hard or the way became difficult, his disciples stuck with him through the good and bad times and held on tight to him. They'd experienced his love, they'd walked with him and seen what he was like in every circumstance, they'd learned that his commandments were for their

good, and he was all they wanted now. They would cling to him, stay close to him at all times, and trust that he alone would give them the power and wisdom they needed to accomplish God's will.

And think of what happened from there in the lives of the disciples, even after Jesus in his physical body left them and returned to heaven. Wouldn't you say they became "all-in," fully engaged, servants of the Lord with all their hearts and all their souls? As Jesus replaced his physical presence with them with the Holy Spirit dwelling inside of them, great fruitfulness and effectiveness in accomplishing God's will as his fully surrendered servants exploded on the world like never before. And God built his kingdom and his church!

My friends, this is the rhythm of life with God. It has a sequence or an order, but at the same time we never move on from any of the steps. They're all continuous and growing. I hope you've concluded that this rhythm is not about attending church once-a-week and then going about our business. It's not about trying to keep a list of rules so we can feel like good, Christian people. It's not half-heartedly giving God what's left over, if we happen to have time this week. It's not about trying to validate ourselves in the eyes of people by our great accomplishments for God. Instead, in this 5-fold rhythm of a faithful life, God invites us to something so much deeper and fulfilling and all-consuming and joy-inducing... something that so many Christians miss out on experiencing because they never move beyond belief to full discipleship and following of Jesus.

Through this rhythm God invites us to discover who he really is and how he is everything we want and more and how nothing we could pursue in this life even begins to compare with the glory of living life as his disciple, his servant: Experiencing his personal love and care for us, walking with him through every moment and challenge of life, loving him back by trusting his Word and living it out, finding our strength and wisdom in him alone as we cling to him and draw continually on the power of his Spirit through prayer, and watching as he accomplishes great and glorious things through us as we serve him with all our heart and all our soul.

#### IV. APPLICATION AND CONCLUSION

Do you sense a need at all for a change in your walk with God today? Are you ready for something more? Are you ready to walk into the life God intends for you? Are you ready to become a true disciple of Jesus Christ? Are you ready to find your identity in simply being an effective servant of the Lord? Imagine how your priorities and how you spend your time and energies would change if you're one goal in life was to be a fully connected and effective *servant of the Lord!*

God's been really working on myself and the other elders recently as we've been evaluating how we as a church body are doing at actively sharing the good news of Christ outside this church building, on mentoring new believers, and on calling and equipping each of us to be fully engaged disciples of Jesus Christ...disciples who are cultivating relationships in this community with those who don't know Christ and by God's power are making more disciples. And let me tell you, we've seen that some major change is needed. I want to ask you all to pray diligently for the elders over the next weeks and months that God would guide us to the change he desires, would keep us from getting overwhelmed and discouraged, and would give us patience and persistence to see the process through and move forward according to God's plan for this unique body here in Union.

And more than that, I want to ask every person here today to do an honest evaluation, with prayer and the Word, of where you are personally on the road to full discipleship with Jesus. Does your life look more like a weekly drop-in at church and then a full pursuit of your own dreams and goals for the rest of the week, or does it look like that 5-fold vision of a fully surrendered servant of God? This is not a guilt trip, by the way. Instead, it's simply an invitation to live life as God intended. It's a call to honestly assess and re-evaluate where you are and where you want to be in your life with God. God knows where you are better than you do, so I promise you won't surprise or disappoint him by what you find. But I pray that as you do this, he will awaken you to desire with your whole heart the life God intends for you as his servant. And I hope each of us will be ready to take our discipleship with Jesus to the next level. When we are, God's going to do some great and powerful things in us and through us that will forever change this church and this community and have an impact way beyond even this town we live in.

As we close today, I want to leave you with two parables from Jesus that beautifully illustrate what it looks like when we're finally ready to fully engage in discipleship with Jesus. This is a short section from a book by Dallas Willard called, *The Divine Conspiracy*. My hope is that in reading it to you, your heart will be encouraged to understand the great value and opportunity and joy that is only found in full discipleship with Jesus, and that with that understanding you will choose it with everything you have. Here we go:

Jesus gave us two parables to illustrate the condition of soul that leads to becoming a disciple. Actually it turns out to be a condition that we all very well understand from our own experiences...

First, [Jesus] said, "The kingdom of the heavens is like where something of extreme value is concealed in a field. Someone discovers it, and quickly covers it up again. Overflowing with joyous excitement he pulls together everything he has, sells it all, and buys the field" (Matt 13:44).

Second, he said, "What the kingdom of the heavens is like is illustrated by a businessman who is on the lookout for beautiful pearls. He finds an incredible value in one pearl. So he sells everything else he owns and buys it" (13:45-46).

These little stories perfectly express the condition of soul in one who chooses life in the kingdom with Jesus. The sense of the *goodness* to be achieved by that choice, of the *opportunity* that may be missed, the *love* for the value discovered, the *excitement* and *joy* over it all, is exactly the same as it was for those who were drawn to Jesus in those long-ago days when he first walked among us. It is also the condition of soul from which discipleship can be effectively chosen today.

May we each choose it with all that we have!

**SERMON APPLICATION AND DISCUSSION GUIDE – 4/15/2018**  
*The Rhythm of Life with God – Joshua 22:1-6*

**Read Joshua 22:1-6, asking the Holy Spirit to guide you as you read. Look at the surrounding verses, take your time and talk to God as you read and meditate on it. Think through the following, writing notes and thoughts and looking up related Scriptures as needed:**

Write down from the passage or from what was shared in the sermon: 1) a truth that stands out to you; 2) anything you believe God is showing you or telling you personally through it; 3) any related Scripture that comes to mind; 4) any questions you have.

Study and reflect on the following Scriptures, and summarize below what they teach you about the value of life with God, living his Word:

*Psalm 19:7-11*

*Matthew 13:44-46*

Both the 2 ½ tribes and Moses focused on living life as servants of the Lord. Moses especially viewed that as his simple mission in life, to be the servant of the Lord in all things. What are some things that might change in your life if that became your simple goal in all you do?

Read Galatians 1:10. According to this verse, what's one thing you can break free from if you just concern yourself with being the servant of the Lord? How do you think that might affect you and how you function in life?

Think about the 5-fold rhythm of life with God: *1) Loving the Lord your God; 2) Walking in all His ways; 3) Keeping His commandments; 4) Clinging to Him; 5) Serving Him with all your heart and with all your soul.* This is a picture of full discipleship with Jesus. As you think about your own life and walk with God, where do you most need to grow in becoming a fully engaged disciple who's functioning as an effective servant of the Lord?

**Summarize below anything God is calling you personally to believe, any actions God is asking you to take, or any attitudes He wants to change. Repent where needed and enjoy God's mercy. Then pray over these items and make a plan for change by the power of the Spirit.**