

As For Me and My House
Psalm 103:7-19, Joshua 24:14-15

Friends, if Joshua could have heard Bob Dylan's 1979 hit song "Gotta serve somebody" I think he would have said – "that's exactly what I was trying to say!"

If you're not familiar with the lyrics of the song here's verse one;

You may be an ambassador to England or France
You may like to gamble, you might like to dance
You may be the heavyweight champion of the world
You may be a socialite with a long string of pearls.

So, as you can see this verse describes different kinds of people and their positions in society, and Dylan wrote seven verses like this to cover everybody in every position he can possibly think of because he wants to make the point that no matter who you are - as the chorus says;

But you're gonna have to serve somebody, yes indeed

You're gonna have to serve somebody,
It may be the devil or it may be the Lord
But you're gonna have to serve somebody.

And if I had thought of it early enough, I would have tried to get the band to do this as our performance song this morning, but I don't think the vocalists would go for it – and seven verse-chorus combinations of this song really does go on a bit long...

But, by the time Dylan finishes the song the point gets made – serving is not an option, you just get to choose who you serve.

And that is essentially what Joshua is putting before the nation of Israel in his last address to them as their leader before He passes away. Who will you serve? He asks...

Interestingly enough the word 'serve' is mentioned seven times as well in these two verses – and while we like to highlight the option of "choice" in both Dylan's song and in Joshua's address, because that appeals to our consumer

mentality - the repeated emphasis on “serving” gives you the sense that this is one of those choices that is not really a choice.

If you really think about what serving the devil or serving the Lord amounts to, if Israel really weighs their options between serving Yahweh or the gods of the nations around them – it’s like those times when our parents gave us a choice but then said to us “think very carefully about which option you are about to choose...because there are consequences”

And so the choice regarding whom we will serve has consequences friends

And it is hoped that the knowledge of these consequences will lead us to choose what is right - to serve the Lord... even if everyone around us does not.

To lead our families to serve the Lord – even if other families around us are not...

Now – just in case we need a little reminder about those consequences, Joshua has just reminded Israel in the previous chapter about what would happen if they chose to serve other gods.

He says; *“If you violate the covenant of the LORD your God, which he commanded you, and go and serve other gods and bow down to them, the LORD’s anger will burn against you, and you will quickly perish from the good land he has given you.”*
(Joshua 23:16)

Now I know that sounds pretty severe...

But, now that we know all about the Covenant and God’s efforts to redeem Israel from slavery and the blessings He will bestow upon them – and the underlying goal to restore all of creation through His Covenant purposes – we can understand the severity and the seriousness of the response required from Israel and the consequences for choosing to respond otherwise.

And friends as we wrap up our three month focus on the Covenant, and how it determines who Christ must be, and how it is so dependent upon families and parenting we need to be reminded that this was not just an exercise in bible study... in getting some more interesting information... in giving practical tips to make parenting easier for us...

Friends this is about having the Covenant passed on to us – about having the blessings of the Covenant passed on to us and our children – about being reminded of what it ultimately at stake in all of this – the very renewal and restoration of this world and our lives!

So the blessing of leading our families to serve the Lord friends, is that we will be a part of the New Heavens and the New Earth.

And Rev 21:3-4 gives us a glimpse of what that will be like and it says *“the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them; he will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no*

more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away.”

But... since we are confronted with a choice, to echo Joshua’s words friends- if leading your family to serve the Lord and having a future in the New Heavens and Earth is not desirable to you, then consider the ultimate consequences of allowing our families to serve the ideologies of secular humanism, consumerism, pluralism of the society in which we live.

Hebrews 10:28-29 describes these ultimate consequences... *“Anyone who has [rejected] the Law of Moses dies without mercy “on the testimony of two or three witnesses.” How much worse punishment do you think will be deserved by those who have spurned the Son of God, profaned the blood of the covenant by which they were sanctified, and outraged the Spirit of grace?*

Friends the dominant ideologies and worldviews of our society do not recognize Jesus Christ as the Son of God, they do not believe humanity needs any help outside of what it can

provide for itself, and they reject any assertion that Jesus is the only faithful covenant partner with God, or any claim that God has a covenant relationship with this world.

And friends, those of you who have had me as your minister over the past few years know that I don't refer to these kinds of warnings in scripture casually, or frequently, or use them to threaten or intimidate or the like...

But the fact is that we're so used to being the kinds of families that we are....

And, we live among other families that have no regard for serving the Lord....

So, every once in a while it's good to hear a scriptural warning like this that puts the fear of God into us and reminds us that we have a very serious responsibility on our hands when it comes to leading our families to serve the Lord.

Now we don't need to become all fearful and frightened in response, because friends remember 2 Tim 1:7 which says *"For the Spirit God gave us does not make us timid, but gives us power, love and self-discipline."*

And so, through this warning in scripture the Holy Spirit reminds us of the consequences of rejecting Jesus, of turning away from the Christ of the Covenants,

In response the Holy Spirit in us is stirred up in power and love and self-discipline and brings us to actions that will help us emulate Joshua and be intentional about leading our families to serve the Lord with Covenant Faithfulness...

Now friends, I know that because you are here this morning – you are not in that position where you would deliberately *spurn the Son of God, profane the blood of the covenant, and outrage the Spirit of grace...*

However we live among other families who are doing so – and we pray that God in his mercy will use us change their hearts

and repent – so it’s very important that we make choices for our families that which reflect the truths of the Covenant for others to see.

Because if we don’t, not only will our witness suffer, but we will just get swept along with the status quo of secular humanism, personal spirituality and pluralism - even if we don’t really believe in these things...

But as Jesus says *“wisdom is proved right by her actions.”*(Matt 11:19) And as James says *“faith without works is dead.”* (James 2:17)

So I want to give you several ways that a family can “S.E.R.V.E the Lord” in Covenant faithfulness so that you can intentionally choose to do this with your family.

And friends the good news is that when you are intentionally focused on these things – you don’t really have to worry if you’re being sucked along with the status quo or not – that kind of takes care of itself...

So, some ways you can lead your family to S.E.R.V.E the Lord...

The S is for “speak.” As we mentioned last Sunday we need to specifically talk to our children and our family members about the Covenant.

There is so much that parents implicitly pass on and teach to their children through the words and terms that are part of the everyday language that is used in the home.

There was a TV commercial a couple years ago which illustrated how kids pick up on phrases they hear at home as a little boy imagines what his dad’s work day is like because he’s overheard about dealing with “a mountain of paperwork” and a boss who is “a real monster.”

And friends we can start bringing in the Covenant words and terms into the day to day life of our family through our prayer times, our scripture times, our blessings, and our discipline.

At the very least friends we should be leading our families in prayer before we eat and before we sleep, and in those times of prayer we can start referring to God as our Covenant keeping God, we can confess the things we have done which make us unfaithful covenant partners, we can thank God for Jesus' Covenant faithfulness, we can ask the Holy Spirit to show us how to respond in love and gratitude and change us to show our covenant faithfulness.

And I know how daunting it can be to figure out how to get scripture into the lives of our family members – but I think this makes it pretty easy... you just start reading the scriptures as a story to them, focusing on the stories of the different Covenants.

You can do this at bed-time or after dinner or some other time when you are all together...

And there's no pressure for you to draw some sort of moral or lesson or application from the stories because the story tells

itself, but if you want to say something you can say something about what it illustrates about Covenant...

And you can use a children's bible for this when they are younger, and a regular translation when they are older – just read them the stories and read them often...

And there is a great deal of formation that can happen if we intentionally "Bless" our children and family members.

Again perhaps as part of the bed-time routine, or before they head out the door to school or work we can give them some parting words of blessing.

Instead of saying "*Have a nice day*" (which incidentally now that I think about would seem to reinforce that whole misconception of 'Christians being nice people who are nice to other nice people and have nice days.') why don't we say something else a bit more powerful, like;

“Go and reflect Christ to the world today...” or “Remember, you are made in the Image of God” or “May the Holy Spirit help you to be faithful in everything today” or “live in Christ’s faithfulness today”

or something more simple but equally as powerful that my Mother always use to send me off with *“Grant...remember who you belong to...”*

And when we have to discipline our family members; that is another opportunity to tie things back to Covenant faithfulness - *“Don’t hit your sister, that’s not how we show our gratitude to Jesus!”*

Or when your kids are older it might *“you’re not being grounded because you got caught with some alcohol and were drunk, you’re being grounded because that’s not how Christians use alcohol to serve God – and I want to think and explain to me how you would use alcohol to God’s glory!”*

So – S is for all these different ways and opportunities we have to intentionally Speak about the Covenant to our family.

Now – the E stands for Easter Bunny, Santa Claus, and Halloween, and you might be thinking that I’m going to say this is where we need to choose to be different from the families around us and not participate in these pagan myths. But that’s not what I’m going to say...

What I will say is that when it comes to the Easter Bunny and Santa Claus consider very carefully, if and how, you are going to teach your kids to believe in something that they can’t see and gets a whole lot of credit for all the activity that goes on for the two biggest holidays in our year and that they will eventually discover doesn’t exist.

Because when they figure it out and they realize you’ve just been stringing them along with nice stories to make them feel good and make things seem a bit more magical and fantastic – how is that going to affect your credibility about what you’ve

been telling them about God, and the Covenant, and Jesus and the scriptures?

They may very well relegate these things to the “childhood fantasy” category as well – considering them helpful myths to make society better, but about as real as Santa Claus...

Now on the flip-side our society does not take the evil and the demonic emphasis of Halloween very seriously and this allows a great deal of ignorance and misconceptions about the devil and his demons and spiritual warfare to flourish.

Thus Halloween actually presents us with a perfect teaching opportunity to speak with our kids about another aspect of the Covenant – the reality of the Serpent, and his fallen angels and how they work and operate and how Christians respond and fight against the Devil.

So as a result of this teaching opportunity you might determine its best to provide an alternative to Halloween for your family, or you might decide - as my parents did – to give

your kids a lesson in how to be in the world but not of the world by allowing us to go out and get free candy – but there were no demonic or evil costumes allowed – because we don’t celebrate Satan...

However you determine to respond with your family just don’t blindly let them go along with it, or for that matter blindly keep them from it – but take advantage of what the opportunity offers you to teach about the Covenant... as the scripture says *“Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil.”* (Eph 5:15-16)

Ok – moving on to R which stands for Rainbow. Friends, when was the last time someone in your family saw a rainbow and said – *oh big whoop, there’s a rainbow~...* like never right?

It’s always – *Wow, cool there’s a rainbow!* And then someone makes a comment about finding a pot of gold at the end of the rainbow...

Which is the perfect time for us to say *“what is that nonsense about? The rainbow is God’s covenant symbol which reminds us that He will never again destroy the earth because of our sinfulness – but He will preserve the earth until Jesus returns to purify it!”*

That’s a beautiful covenant promise and the rainbow is beautiful symbol to remind us of it.

Next is V which stands for Vision and this has to do with helping our family see that God is passionate about whatever they are passionate about because He created it and He is committed to seeing it restored through the Christ fulfilling the Covenant.

For example – your young adult is passionate about cars. Your role is to help him – or her – see that God loves cars to, that God cares just as much, if not more about cars as they do – because that’s true.

What’s also true is that cars are affected by Sin, your job is to help your young adult see that, or maybe just connect the dots between Sin affecting the creation and all the ways cars can be used for evil, or how pollution or wastefulness can result, or how cars can never ultimately make you happy... and so on.

The good news is that Jesus came to redeem the creation – including cars – and you need to help your young adult start to imagine and think, and catch a Vision of how the redemption and restoration of the creation might be lived out in the here and now... as it applies to cars, or sports, or art, or music, or politics, or fashion or whatever it is that your family member is passionate about.

This way we can help them to see that the Covenant and Christ relate and are important to all aspects and interests of life, and give them a Vision to pursue with this.

And finally E is for Endurance. Leading your family to serve the Lord in covenant faithfulness, and encouraging each other in this requires endurance.

You won't see results right away; there will be times you'll be tempted to take shortcuts in order to get the kind of behavior you want to see; your family members may not co-operate with your efforts; they may reject your attempts...

So you need to endure and keep at it, little by little, bit by bit, trusting that the God who gave you this responsibility will work in you and through you as you work to be faithful in this calling.

So, how can we lead our families to s.e.r.v.e the Lord?

Remember Speak... Easter Bunny, Santa Claus and Halloween... Rainbow... Vision... and Endure.

These are just a few ways to help get us started friends – and remember our Lord Jesus promised that He would send us the Holy Spirit to remind us of everything our Lord has taught and to lead us into all truth – which includes many more ways you can lead your family to serve the Lord in covenant faithfulness.

So as we close of this series friends – I think these words from Psalm 103 are a fitting summary of what we have heard God say to us.

Listen...

But from everlasting to everlasting
the Lord's love is with those who fear him,
and his righteousness with their children's children—
with those who keep his covenant
and remember to obey his precepts.

Now go and live it with your families friends.

Amen.