

Thanksgiving Leftovers, giving God your best!
1 Chronicles 21:23-25, 1 Corinthians 3:10-15

Well friends, it's Thanksgiving weekend and that means a Thanksgiving dinner at some point today or tomorrow – maybe today and tomorrow if I play my cards right!

And a Thanksgiving dinner is supposed to be a special meal right? So you probably make a special trip to the grocery store to get the extra foods, the special foods that you're going to serve, and you probably put a whole lot more effort put into preparing the food than normally do - right?

Cleaning and stuffing the turkey, letting it cook in the oven all afternoon, checking it periodically, basting it with turkey juices... washing and peeling potatoes, cutting up and cooking squash, making gravy and cheese sauce from scratch...

And alongside the turkey and potatoes and broccoli and cheese maybe you serve green beans, or a special kind of salad – you know that kind with baby spinach leaves and fruity

vinaigrette dressing with sliced strawberries and slivered almonds... mmmm.

Or if you grew up with Midwest American thanksgiving traditions like I did - maybe your special salad has nothing to do with vegetables, but is some sort of combination of jello, fruit, and whipped cream!

And then you also have desert – which would be pumpkin pie, and more whipped cream...

Anyways I better stop going on about Thanksgiving dinner or you're all going to leave early on me – but you get the point... Thanksgiving dinner is special; we put our best efforts into preparing our best food to celebrate this special occasion.

So imagine how you would feel if someone asked you to come over and have Thanksgiving dinner with them and so you show up – with a nice bottle of wine in hand – and ring the doorbell, and they yell at you to just show yourself in... so you do...

And they yell down to you that they're just finishing up some work, they'll be down in a few minutes, so just make yourself comfortable... so you wander into the kitchen..

And it's cold, and dark, there's no smell of food cooking, no warm cozy bustle of activity... so you flip on a light and sit down on the bar stool next to the island and wait...

And after about fifteen minutes your host comes down – and he looks like he's just rolled out of bed! He's wearing sweatpants and a t-shirt and his hair is a mess and he's not shaved in two days...

And he says “hey – good to see you, thanks for coming over” and he goes over to the fridge and pulls out a box of leftover pizza and get hands you a beer that's been sitting on the counter and says “here Happy Thanksgiving man – let's eat”

How would you feel? Extremely disappointed for starters right – you were expecting turkey and a special dinner – with

pumpkin pie for desert! You certainly would not feel honoured, admired, or loved...

You'd probably feel awkward, unwelcome, offended, insulted... At the very least you expected your host to greet you, make you feel welcome and offer you something suitable for the occasion... but instead you get cold leftovers and warm beer.

And so friends – I wonder, have you ever paused to think if we do this to Jesus? Does the Holy Spirit ever find himself in this kind of position with us?

Have we told our Heavenly Father that we want him in our lives... have we asked him to be with us, to provide for us, care for us, and save us... and then instead of treating the Father, Son and Holy Spirit like He is someone special and giving him our best... we give the Triune God the leftovers of our lives?

Think about that for a moment friends – does God get our best... or does he get our leftovers.

When we do up our monthly budget – do we set aside our 10% as the first line item in our expenses or do we see how much we can spare at the end of the month?

When we spend time with Christ in prayer, reading His word, and listening for the Holy Spirit – are we alert, rested and fully engaged – or are we distracted, tired and exhausted at the end of a long day?

When we consider what we'll do with our week-ends – do we make plans around worshipping our Lord and Saviour with other Christians or do we figure we'll just attend whenever we happen to have a free Sunday?

Friends, who gets the best of who we are and what we have?

When it comes to being at the top of your game, offering your peak performance levels, giving it your all, making time for what is important, and putting your money where your mouth is... what would this reveal about who or what gets your best?

Because we all have that someone or something that gets our best, right? That girlfriend or boyfriend who makes us want to be better person, or maybe our kids, or our profession.

Or maybe we have a dream... we want to play in the NHL or become a professional dancer so we spend all our time and energy and our money playing hockey or dancing – working towards that goal...

Whatever it is friends – we all have something that gets the best of who we are and what we have – and this morning we need to examine our hearts and ask ourselves... is it Christ?

Because that's what Thanksgiving week-end is really about - to have us pause and identify what is getting "the best" of us and why? Are we giving our best to God – to Jesus, to the Holy Spirit... in order to say thank you – you are awesome, you are amazing, you are special – I love you!

Because this world as we know it won't last! And if anything else but Jesus Christ is getting our best... then we are foolishly

investing our resources into something that will perish when we pass into the next life – into the new heavens and the new earth!

Friends... we know that it's wise to invest - we invest in RESP's for our kid's college tuition, we invest in RRSP's and Pension Plans for when we retire –

But what are we investing in for the times when we pass into the new heavens and the new earth?

That day is coming... and if our faith and trust is in Jesus Christ, and we turn to him for the forgiveness of our sin – then we have a place in the new heavens and the new earth.

But until that time friends – giving God our best is what Paul refers to in 1 Cor 3:12 as building on the foundation of Christ Jesus with gold, silver and precious stones – not wood, hay and straw.

So friends my goal this morning is to motivate you to build with gold, silver and precious stones, to help you desire to give God your best – to go from good to great for God... why?

Well, first of all because you may not realize that when Christ returns this world will be made new and sin and evil will be purged from the creation through a refining process of some sort.

2 Peter 3:12-13 says *“That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat. ¹³ But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, where righteousness dwells.”*

This world is good – but the next world will be great!

So our deeds, our lives, our actions, our accomplishments need to be great - like gold, silver, and precious stones – because when these are exposed to fire – it doesn't destroy them, it just burns the impurities out of them and they go from good to great.

So too with our lives friends – a life spent giving God your best will only get better when Christ returns.

But, if God is just getting our leftovers – then friends, we’re building our lives with wood, hay and straw and when this world is refined – everything good we’ve worked for, while we are Christians no less, will be destroyed...

Now if you spent any time helping people throw out their flood damaged possessions and ripping out their basements then you’ve got a small glimpse of what it’s like to lose what you’ve worked for...

so imagine what it’s like to realize that your best years, your best efforts, your best ideas will not give you any return in the life to come.

Friends - at that point I’m sure you would say “well if I had known... if my minister had just told me - I would have done things differently!”

So, its my job to tell you... so in the words of the late great Biggie Smalls “if ya don’t know, now ya know!”

Giving God our best is investing in something that will last and give us a great return when we pass into the new heavens and new earth, and that is a great reason to give God our best...

But friends – shouldn’t we also want to give the Father, Son and Holy Spirit our best because we are in love with the Trinity?

Because we are awestruck by the incomprehensibility of how God can be three in one... friends this is why I like to use the NCD Three colors of spirituality tool – because it helps us grow deeper in our experience of God as the Trinity.

The Trinity is not a doctrine to be understood mentally – it is how we encounter the fullness of the Living God as He is working in our lives.

We are captivated by his awesome creativeness - from majestic mountains, vast oceans, swirling galaxies to the intricacies of a spider's web...

We are overwhelmed that the Father would send his only Son to become one of us, offer his life on a cross for our salvation, and pursue us with His truth in spite of ourselves.

We are caught up in the power of the Holy Spirit – filled with enthusiasm, overflowing with joy and love – and burning with his power as it flows out from us.

You see friends - when we catch even a glimpse of how awesome God – the three in one – is, it makes us want to give Him our best! Amen?

So that's why we should give our best to God – but friends, to go from good to great we do have to be brutally honest about what keeps us from doing what we should. So we have to admit that in spite of these great reasons... we still often give God whatever is left over.

Because we just get so busy- our schedule fills up, everybody wants a piece of us, there's work and family and school and friends and we're doing this and we're doing that, going here and going there... and by the time it's all done we don't a whole lot of time, energy, or anything even left over for ourselves - let alone for God – right?

And then we reach that point where we are burned-out and we start dropping things because we're overloaded – and we need to reclaim something for ourselves so where do we take it from? From what we give to God...

And as long as we are being brutally honest we also have to admit that we are often afraid that if we give God the best there won't be enough left over for what we want and need.

We don't give God our best because we're counting every penny to make sure we have enough to keep us secure.

Friends its ok to be honest about this – even the great King David struggled with this.

In 1 Chronicles 21 tells us how King David, in his later years had all the fighting men in Israel counted in order to determine how large of an army he had. Now you might say “what’s wrong with that?”

It would stop David from giving God his best – the best of his trust, his obedience, his worship...

How many times had God fought for David so that David had defeated an enemy much larger and more powerful and better armed than him?

Enough that David should know better than to count all the men so that he could be assured his army was large enough and powerful enough to handle whatever threat David was worried about...

When David trusted in God for protection – the end result was usually David giving God his best through his talents of music and poetry – and so we have all the Psalms where David praises God for his mighty acts and deeds.

The good news friends, is that when we stop giving God our best – He steps in somehow to remind us how foolish this is - mostly through how things go wrong as a consequence that inevitably follows when God is not number one priority in our lives.

In David’s case God sends a plague, and to make a long story short David quickly realizes how foolish he’s been, and He sees that other people are paying for his sin and asks God to stop the plague.

So God tells David to build an altar on the threshing floor of Araunah and offer a sacrifice – incidentally this is the future site where Solomon would build the Temple, and this is where the conversation between Araunah and David, which we read, takes place.

And what has always struck me from this conversation is that David says to Araunah *“I will not take for the Lord what is yours, or sacrifice a burnt offering that costs me nothing.”* (1 Chronicles 21: 24)

You see friends, if we are struggling with having to give our best to God, and he's really getting our leftovers instead – the best way to break out of that rut is by making a sacrifice to God that costs you something.

And I also like this verse because it reminds us that worshiping God costs us.

And yes, Sunday morning worship will cost us – its costs us sleep, it costs us weekend time, or peaceful family time if we have to let our kids know that worship is not optional...

And participating in the singing and praying might cost us some dignity or self-consciousness, and it costs to give money in the offering...

And being willing to commit to being scheduled to help serve in some way ties you up for a few weekends, means you have to plan around ministry instead of fitting ministry into your plans...

So yes – worship costs us. But, remember... the bible's definition of worship encompasses everything we do.

Worship is whatever we do as a response to God's actions of creation, provision, protection, salvation, and so on... all of life is worship.

And so giving God our best friends – really boils down to what the Apostle Paul says in Colossians 3:23 -24 ²³ *Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters, ²⁴ since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving.*

And so to go from good to great for God in our lives and in our church starts with sacrifice friends, worshipping God in whatever we do will cost us something...

This is why in verses 18-22 Paul is instructing wives to submit to husbands and husbands to love their wives, and father's

not to discourage and embitter their children, and indebted servants to work hard for their masters...

Because worshipping includes such things as marriage, parenting, and work, and Paul wants us to see some general examples of how giving God our best in normal everyday situations will cost us something.

Submitting will cost us our autonomy... Loving will cost us our individual rights... working hard in a low income situation costs us our egotism – sacrificing these things isn't necessarily a bad thing either as they all tend to get in the way of what the Holy Spirit wants to do in us and through us...

The the exact cost, the specific things we will need to sacrifice – well that is going to be different for each of us friends, because the Holy Spirit is guiding each of us according to the plans God has for our lives – but the principle is true: worshipping God in all we do - that will cost us.

But take heart friends – because if it costs you then you can be encouraged that you are giving God your best.

Remember when Jesus was at the temple with his disciples and they were watching wealthy Pharisees giving large offerings and tithes – and a widow came up and gave two pennies.

Jesus turned and said to his disciples *“Truly I tell you,” he said, “this poor widow has put in more than all the others. All these people gave their gifts out of their wealth; but she out of her poverty put in all she had to live on.”*

Friends may the Holy Spirit work in us so that this Thanksgiving is all about giving God our best – and not our leftovers.

Amen.