

Victory of the Lamb – Family Matters – God: Before or After

Joshua 24:14-15 – Pastor Bill Limmer

Often when I run, I am listening to podcasts. In one of the podcasts I was listening to this past week, the person said to keep your curiosity up, study something outside of you would normally study. So I googled recipes and found Sally's Baking Addiction. And this week I learned: When certain recipes call for ingredients like butter, cream cheese, eggs, milk, and/or yogurt to be at room temperature they mean it. When at room temperature dairy ingredients form an emulsion which traps air. While baking in the oven, that trapped air expands and produces a fluffy baked good: like a [light-textured cake](#) or a [tender cupcake](#). Not only this, room temperature ingredients bond together very easily since they're warmer, creating a seamless and evenly textured batter. A smooth batter = a uniformly textured baked good. Cold ingredients do not incorporate together as easily. Or even at all! This results in clumpy frosting, chunky cheesecake, dense cookies, flat breads that aren't supposed to be flat and muffins that are more cracker width than muffin width. In other words, complete recipe failures.

Today we are beginning a series called Family Matters. I am looking forward to growing along with you in this series because it is through our families that God has designed peace and stability for our society. In this series we will not only look marriage, parenting, singles, sibling rivalries, blended families. And this morning we are going to the main ingredient in any person's or family life: God. And our main attention will be God: Before or After.

Betty Crocker, Paula Dean and Bobby Flay are not the only ones who have recipe books. Let's turn to God's recipe book: Joshua 24:¹⁵ **But if serving the LORD seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your ancestors served beyond the Euphrates, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD.**" Right before these words, Joshua has laid out in amazing detail of many of the things God has done for them based on who God is and not on who they are. In other words, God is the God of unconditional love. And then Joshua points out that they have seen people with different backgrounds and traditions being led astray by their hearts to the degree that they worship things that they made with their own imaginations and hands as opposed to God who made all things. How ridiculous to worship something made out of wood. We would never be some ridiculous would we. Or would we? Picture of dollar bill. People worship idols made of metal but we would never do anything like that. Or would we? Picture of a car. Our heart is an idol factory. Hidden in every one of us are rival gods. Idolatry is not just a failure to obey God, it is a setting of the whole heart on something/someone besides God. When our missionaries went to Africa, the people would come to faith but would still have a superstitious "need" for witch doctors. It is kind of ridiculous until you think about ourselves: - knock on wood; lucky socks or shirt, black cat, don't walk under a ladder.

God is before all things or he is not your God. He is before all things, he is the priority, or he is after someone or something. God is to come before all things and all people. If he comes after anything or anyone, someone or something else has captured our heart and that is what we are worshiping. What often become idols in our lives are good things that get out of order. Do you realize that placing someone or something before God or placing God after anything or anyone is ALWAYS the reason we do everything wrong. When we sin, whatever sin it is, no matter how big or small we might rank it, it is a sin

against the first Commandment – **you shall have no other gods**. Often our excuse is something like, “it is my life.”

After my second year of college, I quit. I had had enough. I wanted to be a pastor I didn't want to be a Latin scholar. I wanted to share the love of Jesus not be a history major. So I quit. Skip that, I wasn't going to waste my life. I had been to AK on vacation before and that is where my sister and family lived so that is where I went. In Fall, my sister's family wanted to go visit our family back in the lower 48. I told them I would take them to Anchorage to catch their flight because flying out of Anchorage was less expensive than flying out of Fairbanks. I worked some extra hours so I could take a week off and spend some time in Anchorage while I was there. After I dropped them off at the airport, on my way back to the hotel, driving my brother in laws brand new four wheel drive SUV, I saw these what I considered to be very beautiful girls on the corner as I drove by. I said to myself, “self, we need to go check that out again.” And as I turned around the SUV to make my way back, it dawned on me what these two beautiful girls were. They were professionals. And I went to my hotel, devastated they these two young women were throwing away their lives. And I thought about my life. And I concluded – “well at least I found my life.” And then I remembered Jesus words: Mark 8:35 **For whoever wants to save their life^a will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it.** ³⁶ **What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul?** Lose yourself or you will lose yourself. The thought of people losing their beautiful souls for all eternity is what God used to have me enroll back in college. I desperately want people to believe in the God who loves them, the God who threw away his life so we all could have life no matter our culture, traditions, rebellions, mistakes, blatant wrong doings.

Choose for yourselves this day. It is a this day important thing. Christianity isn't yearly, seasonally, monthly, weekly, it is a daily thing. Just as the dinner you had one month isn't nourishing you today so just because we may have placed God first in our lives a month ago doesn't mean he is first today. When interstate 79 was under construction in western Pennsylvania there was one section that proved to be quite a difficult section. This section was really swampy. On at least one occasion a bulldozer was parked on what the workers thought was solid ground. However, by morning it had sunk. Often when they put down pilings in the attempt to find bedrock, the piling disappeared. Our hearts are like that. We think we've learned about grace, set our idols aside, and reached a place where we're serving God not for what we're going to get from him but for who he is. But then we find there is even deeper more meaningful spot.

Mr. Bill visited us this past week (picture up). He was instrumental in the building of our worship facility. More than a handful of you know him. I met him for the first time this week. He has a walking stick. On top of the walking stick, he has carved a heart with a cross inside of it to remind him that Christ is the center of life. I think that is going to help me remember that truth and I hope helps you and your family remember that truth as well.

Here is the recipe I want to share with you. Jesus went first. Jesus didn't wait for you or me to act a certain way or think a certain way or say a certain prayer. Jesus went first. Jesus gave himself for the doubters, skeptics, selfish, unbelievers, the think they are do good-ers, and the rest. Jesus lost himself so you could be found. The holy Jesus was accused and found guilty so that you I might be declared innocent and be set free. Jesus was hammered for all of your wrongs so that you would not be nailed by them, Jesus died so that we might live. Jesus gave his perfect all for all of our imperfect giving and Jesus gave it all for what we haven't given. Jesus placed God first in his life in our place. Jesus took the time to

pray in our place and he prayed for us. Jesus put God first even when it wasn't convenient and even when it cost him his life. Jesus worship God perfectly in our place. Jesus went before so we could have an after.

Jesus is calling you to be a part of his family and so move from dread to expectation, fear to faith, guilt to grace, from sorrow to joy, uncertainty to certainly, death to life, defeat to victory. The Holy Spirit is calling you through good news of Jesus Christ to go from wandering to wonder and awe to worship God, to place him Before all the other ingredients of life. Whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.

What does worship look like for you? Sunday mornings, prayer, Bible time, doing your best for his glory not yours, singing, sharing God. Those are all true, but I want to share one way that many of you don't realize you are worshiping God because it is a way that you are often beating yourselves up. That is when temptations come. When temptations come and you don't give in you are worshiping God because you are saying God and his way is more important than the sin you are being tempted to do. That you are loving God more than the sin you are being tempted to do. And if by chance you would fall, remember Jesus rose three days later guaranteeing you salvation by grace through faith. Worship is not about you or me, or how well we do. It is not about our good but it is about our God. Jesus went first. Worship is all about Jesus, Before and After and Always. It is a personal and family matter.