

Alleys Chapel UMC

Lay Sermon

May 24, 2020

The Covenant and Calvary

Focus scripture: Hebrews 8:7-12

Almost from the beginning God was confronted with two problems that threatened His relationship with mankind whom, ironically, He had created for the purpose of a relationship with the Creator through all that had been created. The first problem occurred in that perfect place that God had made for mankind, Eden. That first problem – disobedience - was the core from which all future sin would radiate. The second problem – pride - occurred at a place that mankind built as a monument to himself, Babel. It became the symbol of utter rebellion against God and remains so today.

Throughout the scriptures God teaches us a fundamental lesson for life – when you have a problem, deal with it and, He led by example. He dealt with the Babel problem through the Covenant and solved the Eden problem at Calvary.

The Covenant addressed the two fundamental problems that culminated in human pride – relationship and revelation. Mankind was created for a relationship with God but was also given free will. It was that free will that led to man's corrupted concept of God. Corruption is marked by perversion and subversion of integrity. For mankind, God became an abstract form. The many idols that man embraced perverted the image of God and the "if it feels good, do it" approach to life subverted rigid adherence to God's code of moral values. Thus man's attitude and actions prevented a right relationship with God. The Covenant was designed to correct this.

Any relationship is built on mutual understanding. God obviously understood mankind and it was equally obvious that man did **not** understand God. Revelation

was needed. The Covenant addressed this through the law and the prophets. This revelation of course, culminated in Christ. It is through Him that we know God and have a model for living. We are made aware of what God's kingdom is like and how its citizens ought to conduct themselves. More importantly we become aware of the Master's hand;

*"And many a man with life out of tune
All battered and bruised with hardship
Is auctioned cheap to a thoughtless crowd
Much like that old violin
A mess of pottage, a glass of wine,
A game and he travels on.
He is going once, he is going twice,
He is going and almost gone.
But the Master comes,
And the foolish crowd never can quite understand,
The worth of a soul and the change that is wrought
By the Touch of the Masters' Hand."*

(From the poem *The Touch of the Master's Hand* by Myra Brooks Welch)

Some of life's most significant issues, as with our freedoms, can be addressed only through great sacrifice. Such was the case with the Eden problem. Make no mistake, the Covenant was awesome but it had three gaps, not by God's choice but because man had been given free will. These gaps were; (1) There was no internal motivation to obey God, (2) There was no provision for forgiveness and (3) There

was no opportunity for an enduring relationship with God. All three of these gaps were bridged at Calvary. At the heart of the solution was the concept of redemption secured for us by the sacrifice Christ made for mankind at Calvary. The basis of redemption is forgiveness, thus it is crucial to understand forgiveness.

Forgiveness begins by forgiving ourselves and then forgiving others. Only then are we forgiven by God. This is best understood by recognizing that life is filled with negative events and these are encoded in our memory often resulting in anger and resentment. Only forgiveness can neutralize this anger and resentment and only then can we experience motivation. Motivation is the pathway to changing our way of thinking, feeling and behaving toward others and the way we treat others mirrors our treatment of God. It is only then that we understand what God wants and why He wants it and that my friends is the basis of an enduring relationship with God.

Commander Mitsuo Fuchida of the Imperial Japanese Navy Air Service led the first wave of bomber and fighter planes during Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor. At 7:40 a.m. on December 7, 1941, he sent up the green flare from his plane signaling the order to attack; and he ordered his radio operator to send the message "Tora! Tora! Tora!," informing the Japanese that they had achieved complete surprise.

After the war a number of Japanese military personnel were put on trial for war crimes relating to their treatment of prisoners of war. Fuchida, called on to testify, felt the trials were a sham. He had harbored resentment of the United States for decades due to its restrictions on Asian immigration, and he believed the Americans had treated Japanese POWs just as badly. He sought out recently released POWs to gather evidence. It was then he met his former flight engineer Kazuo Kanegasaki, presumed to have died at the Battle of Midway, who had instead been taken prisoner.

Rather than telling a story of abuse and torture by Americans, Kanegasaki told him of a young American woman, Peggy Covell, who treated him and his fellow prisoners with great kindness even though Japanese soldiers had killed her missionary parents in the Philippines. Fuchida was astounded. The code of the

warrior not only permitted revenge, it demanded it; but this woman declined revenge and offered compassion to Japanese prisoners.

This experience led Fuchida to Christianity and in his book, Pearl Harbor to Calvary, he wrote, “I would give anything to retract my actions of 29 years ago, but it is impossible. Instead, I now work at striking the death blow to the basic hatred which infects the human heart and causes such tragedies.” I believe this statement embodies the miracle of Calvary – forgiveness, motivation and an enduring relationship with God.