

"Until The Lord Has Given Rest To Your Brethren"

In a family, you often have to do things that you don't particularly like, but you do them anyways because you know they need to be done. Maybe some of the kids can relate here on some of the chores you have to do. I mean, how many people really like cleaning the toilets in a home? But things like that need to get done.

All throughout life we're faced with different responsibilities that we have before us. Often times those responsibilities aren't things we're really that excited about, but we take them on if our duty requires them or our circumstances dictate it. But of course, often it's those circumstances that are before us that we wish were different. We're then called to follow through on our responsibilities, even when things aren't the way we like. But when we still do step up and serve in those situations, that's commendable. Hopefully the attitude of our heart at such times is equally commendable.

I raise this for today, because we have a passage here where God's people are being called to serve their fellow brothers and sisters. Actually, this passage is full of different groups of people all being called to different responsibilities in the family of God. I want us to look at these different groups today and see how they're being called to serve. I'm sure not everyone in these different groups thought their responsibility was exactly what they wanted. But God was calling them to serve as a part of a bigger plan to bring all God's people into a state of rest. That's what verse 20 says. Even though some of the tribes of Israel had now already received their inheritance of land, their men of fighting age still had to go with the rest of the Israelites to war, until the Lord had given rest to all the brothers. This rest is referring to the rest of the Promised Land.

Well, this subject is one relevant for us as well. When Jesus washed his disciples feet, he did it as an example. He wanted them and us to serve each other. We ought to look not only to our own interests, but also to the interests of others. That's a truth that's generally true, that we should show love and concern for everyone. But it's a truth that's especially true for the family of God. That we should especially show love and concern for our fellow members of Christ's church. And what that means is that we might be called to serve as a part of the family of God, and yet find ourselves in circumstances that aren't maybe what we'd like. In other words, how God calls us to serve our brothers and sisters in the church, based on where we are personally at, may not be that glorious. It may not be even what you want or like. But I hope that as we look at this passage, we can seek to have our hearts grown to love serving our brothers and sisters in Christ, knowing that ultimately it is the Lord God we serve.

And so let's start by doing a quick survey of what's going on in this passage. Remember from last week that Moses was telling how they had conquered the two Amorite kings just east of the Jordan River. Now this passage is Moses remembering back to how they divided up this land and gave it as an inheritance to two and a half tribes of Israel. This land east of the Jordan River became the inheritance in the Promised Land for the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and half of the tribe of Manasseh. And so at that point, God commanded that the men of fighting age of these two and a half tribes had to continue on with their other brother Israelites, while they left their women, children, and livestock in their new home. They continue on with the rest of Israel to go and conquer the rest of the Promised Land west of the Jordan River. And yet in the background of all this is Moses. While

the men of fighting age were being commanded by God to cross over to Promised Land, God was telling Moses that he was not allowed to cross over. He had to stay behind and prepare Joshua to lead the people instead.

So that's a very quick summary of this passage. But what I'd like us to primarily examine today are the different groups of people in this passage. I see God calling different groups to different responsibilities. These different roles are for the good of the group. They are each being called to serve in different ways with the overall goal to bring rest to the entire people of God. So that all God's people would find rest in the inheritance that he had planned for them. And so what I want us to see is how each different group was being called to serve the larger group of God's people. I want us to see how this challenges our service as well. The challenges that each group of Israelites faced here, helps us think about the challenges we face as we look to serve our fellow brothers and sisters in Christ.

Well, this might still seem a little fuzzy, so let's just look at the different examples in this passage to flush this out. Let's start with the most obvious one: the men of valor from the two and a half tribes. Look at verse 18. These are the men of fighting age that would have to continue on with their brothers to fight. Think about their situation. They finally received their inheritance. Numbers 32 tells us that the tribes of Reuben and Gad had specially requested this land because they had a lot of cattle, and that this land was perfect for livestock. Their request was granted, but with the caveat that they had to continue on to fight with their brothers. After the rest of the Promised Land was conquered, then they could finally return to their new homes. And so they'd have to leave their wife and kids home with all their spoil of livestock. Verse 19 even acknowledges that they have lots of livestock, probably referring to all the recent spoil they took in the last two battles. And so put yourself in their shoes. They had this wonderful new inheritance now; they just weren't sure if they'd ever get to enjoy it. They were going off to war. And yet, certainly, isn't that the right thing for these brothers to do? They were part of a family. The other tribes helped them conquer the land they had gotten as an inheritance. It was only right that they'd do the same for their brothers.

How does this challenge our own service in the church? We might be called to serve where there is some risk involved. We often mention the possibility of Christian persecution, but many forms of service in the church don't put us on the front lines of that, so to speak. But some service does. Are we willing to step out of our comfort zone to serve if God calls us to do so? Along the same lines, maybe this challenges our service in the sense that maybe we'd rather not be bothered with serving in the church. Maybe we'd rather just sit back and enjoy what's rightfully ours, and only serve when it's convenient for us?

Let's look at our next example in this passage - the women and children in this passage who were going to stay behind in their new homes while everyone else went off to war. Here they are all alone in their new home in some strange new land. The mothers had the kids to take care of. There was the many cattle to take care of. This while all the dads, husbands, and friends take off for war. You've seen this before in the movies if not in real life. The emotional scene of a husband and father going off somewhere dangerous while the mother and kids have to say goodbye, not knowing if he will ever return. On top of all this, they would probably be less safe with all the men of fighting age going off to war, while they are sitting on this huge nest egg of cattle for everyone to see. But of course someone had to stay and hold down the fort and take care of the cattle while the rest went off to war. You might think back to WWII were you had Rosie the Riveter

- women stepping up to keep the factories open here at home to support the war effort.

Well, again, how does this challenge our own service in the church? Maybe you are being called to serve in a way that will mean a sacrifice of some time away from your loved ones. That's a pretty large sacrifice. But if we are willing to do it for the armed forces of our country for our nation's national security, ought we not be willing to do the same for our God or for our fellow believers? Similarly, God might call you to serve in such a way that puts you in a less secure position. Maybe it will involve some financial sacrifice in some way? Maybe you have to weigh taking a more active role in serving in the church against say taking on a second job to earn a little more income? Or maybe it's some other sacrifice that might affect your overall stability? Or maybe it's just what might appear to you a less glorious job. Maybe some of the women in this passage didn't think it was very glorious to stay home with the kids and cows while the men went off to battle. But again, God calls us to all do the part he's assigned us. Each job's important.

The next group I'd like us to look at is the remaining ten and a half tribes. They had survived the battles so far. Their service in harm's way had a very tangible result - their other brothers got a nice inheritance. The other two and a half tribes were blessed. That was their service. Now they had to continue on to fight, with the hopes that they would survive the remaining battles that they eventually could receive an inheritance themselves. I could see their temptation could be to be covetous. They could be tempted to covet the inheritance that their brothers had already received. But of course them coveting their brother's inheritance wouldn't help them get theirs. It wouldn't serve their brothers, and it wouldn't serve them.

This certainly challenges our service as well. We could be tempted to covet the blessings of our fellow brothers or sisters when we serve. That could come in all sorts of forms. You might like the jobs other people have in the church. You might wish you had the life that others do in the church. Again, this can come in all sorts of forms. But being content and not coveting in your service is also a part of how you love and serve your brothers. In other words, it's not only our actions that are important in our service. It's our heart as well. What is our heart feeling as we serve?

The next example I want us to consider in this passage is Joshua. Look at verse 21. We see Moses encouraging him. We're reminded in verse 28 that God was calling Joshua to be the new leader of God's people. Joshua would cross over with the troops and lead them in conquest of the Promised Land. Now we're not told here what Joshua thought about all this. Maybe he was excited about this. But there is an implication here that he might have at least been tempted to be afraid. In verses 21-22, Moses is specifically encouraging Joshua not to be afraid. He's reminding Joshua of everything God had already done for them, and how God would continue to go with them. Joshua didn't need to fear because God would fight for them. But at the same time, Joshua is only human. Think of the big shoes he was stepping into. Who could replace Moses? And think of all the trouble Moses got into with these people. All the hard times they had given him. Was this really the job Joshua wanted? Again, we're not told if this is exactly how Joshua felt or not, but the text certainly raises the question. God thought Joshua needed to be encouraged and strengthened as he sets out to be a leader.

This also challenges how we serve others. Sometimes God calls us to serve by calling us to be a leader. That might seem like a glorious position. Who would complain about God calling you to serve as a leader? Well, I think that might be our first thought, but in reality it's not so often the case. Being a leader isn't

always so much fun. It might have the appearance of being glamorous, but just look at how up and down our U.S. Presidential approval ratings can be, and you'll realize that being a leader isn't just about glamour. Not everyone is just waiting to take on the responsibilities of leadership. And yet I don't remember anyone asking Joshua if he wanted the job of leading God's people into the Promised Land. And yet that was the way in which God was calling him to serve. It was his responsibility to serve in that way. What about you? Has God called you to serve in a position of leadership, but you've resisted it?

The last example I'd like us to look at today from our passage is Moses. Obviously Moses is a servant of the Lord. The Scriptures tell us that repeatedly. Moses obviously served his fellow brothers and sisters in so many ways. The Bible makes that clear. But here Moses finds himself unable to cross over the Jordan into the heart of the Promised Land. I'm sure he wanted nothing more than to cross over with the "boys" to go fight in the military battles that lay ahead. And yet God told him "no." God would not have him serve in that capacity anymore.

And yet Moses still did have an opportunity to serve. At the twilight of his earthly life, God had a responsibility for him. Verse 28. God had a job for him. He was to command, encourage, and strengthen Joshua. He was to prepare Joshua to take his place. And of course his service wasn't just in helping Joshua at this point. Notice verse 29. They stayed at Beth Peor. The rest of the book of Deuteronomy is basically them staying there in Beth Peor and Moses is teaching the next generation about the covenant God had made with them. And so Moses wouldn't be allowed to cross over the Jordan into the Promised Land. But he was still able to serve. He prepared Joshua and even all the people for their final conquest of the Promised Land.

Again, Moses is another example in this passage of how we might want to serve in one way, but God has us serve in another way. Or how our plans might be different than God's. Moses so wanted to cross over into the land. He pleads here with God. But God says "no." And yet God does partially answer his request. Notice in verse 25, Moses asks God to let him cross over and see the land. God doesn't let him cross over, but he does let him see the land. Verse 27 describes God bringing him to the top of Mount Pisgah where he got to peer over the Land and see it from afar.

This also challenges how we serve. Sometimes God calls us to serve our fellow brothers in such a way that we don't get to see the outcome. Sometimes we want so much to see the fruits of our labors, and we only get to see them from afar. Sometimes our most important service is not to do the work ourselves, but to pass on the knowledge and vision to the next generation. But of course that can be tough. Think of at a job. Who likes to train their replacement? But as Christians we have to ask how I can serve God today? And maybe at some point the service needs to transition to passing on a vision to the next generation, when really you wish you were right there on the front lines yourself.

Trinity Presbyterian Church, as a church and as a ministry, we have a lot of tasks before us. We have a lot of needs for service right here. We have a lot of responsibilities. There are certainly plenty of places to serve. Frankly at times it seems like with our small numbers that we have more needs than resources. But God is faithful. He will not give us more than we can handle. And he will place before each of us different ways that we can serve him and serve our fellow brothers and sisters.

For the nation of Israel here, no one could really "rest" until they all entered the rest. That's what verse 20 says. That's where the title of our sermon comes from today. The rest they were all looking for was to take hold of all the

Promised Land. God would have Joshua eventually lead all the people into that rest. And yet Hebrews 4:8 gives us an important insight to this. It says that Joshua didn't give them the ultimate rest. That there was remaining still a rest for the people of God. Jesus told us this himself when he was here on earth. John 14:2, Jesus said, "I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to myself; that where I am, there you may be also."

You see the ultimate rest in store for God's people is more than just a plot of land in the Middle East. The real rest God has in store for his people is a heavenly rest. It's about spending eternity with him in the New Heavens and the New Earth. When all our sin will be completely removed from us. When we'll be fully conformed to the image of Christ. When we truly love our neighbors as ourselves, and live our lives completely for God's glory. Then there will be no more pain or sorrow. God gave the Israelites an earthly rest, this Promised Land, to teach them and us a lesson. That we need an even better land. A heavenly one. And that if the mere earthly land could only come through God's gracious gift to his people, how much more is that the case with heaven? If we are to enter this heavenly rest, it is by the gift of God to us. He brings his people into this inheritance.

And we know he does that through Jesus. And think about how Jesus accomplishes this. By serving us. What he showed as an example with the washing of the feet, was an illustration of something far greater that he did for us. He laid down his life for us. But don't think this was just some fun sort of thing he just couldn't wait to do as his act of service. Remember the Garden of Gethsemane. When Jesus' spirit was deeply troubled and distressed. When he said that his soul was exceedingly sorrowful, even unto death. Faced with the act of service God had called him to do, he was overwhelmed at the magnitude of it. The act of the cross was to be full of suffering and shame. And yet for the joy set before him he endured the cross. The joy wasn't the act itself. The joy was the outcome of it. Our salvation. Love shown to enemies turned into friends; you and me. Jesus submit himself to his father's will when he prayed in that garden, "Lord, if there is any other way; and yet not what I will, but what you will." Jesus did this so we could each enter heavenly rest.

And yet, saints, we have not yet entered that rest, have we? Well some of us have, those who have gone to be with the Lord. But the rest of us who remain are still on the way. And until we enter that final rest, we are called to be serving. Yes, to serve God. But also, to serve each other. We are to love and serve our Christian brothers and sisters. Not *just* to serve them individually, but *together* to serve all the needs of God's people.

We saw many examples in today's passage of what this looked like for Israel. It's not that much different for us though, is it? There are responsibilities to be taken up in the church, for the spiritual well being of whomever walks in that door. You see, as a church, we are helping people to find the true rest. And so when we serve in the church, it's with that goal in mind. To bring all God's chosen people to the true rest. The rest that is in Jesus alone, through faith in him.

Of course, if we are going to have strength to serve our brothers and sisters, it will only be through Jesus who did this first for us. And so may your foundation for serving others, not be for earthly reasons. Things like looking good before others, or as a way to meet new people. No, may you serve others because Christ first served you. May you serve others because you have been served with the greatest act of service. That Jesus gave up his life so that you enter into the

best rest you can ever imagine. Trust in what Christ did for you by faith. And then may your service be an expression of what an amazing thing he has done for each of us.

Now as you each reflect on this message, let me mention a few things specific to our congregation. There are so many people in this congregation who do so much. Who serve in so many ways. Frankly with a small congregation like we have, it means that most of us wear many hats. I look around the room and I can think of ways in which each of you are already serving in this church. And so as I preach this message for today, I'm thankful to pastor a church that has so many eager servants. I don't preach this message today because we lack people willing to serve. No, I rejoice that so many of you are so eager to serve.

But I do think we would all do well to reflect today on how we serve. Are the jobs that you are doing really what you want to be doing? Maybe you've ended up serving in the place that you are because you've sensed God's call to that ministry, even though your heart might not be in it. If so, I thank you for heeding God's call even in some area that you're not excited about. And yet, I would ask that you pray about that. When you serve that way, it has the tendency to become a point of bitterness. That you end up serving because you know it needs to be done, not because your heart really wants to. If that's you, I point you back to Jesus. Learn from his lead in how he brought these sorts of things to God in prayer. Pray that God will change your heart that you could cheerfully serve in these areas. Or pray that if it's his will he have some other way for you to serve. Pray that you'd have the heart of God that you see in this passage and in the New Testament. Of how God calls his people to truly love their brothers and sisters and joyfully be willing to make whatever sacrifices are needed to serve.

Maybe for you, the biggest frustration is that your current life situation doesn't allow you to serve the way that you want to. Moses could relate. But pray in that situation for God to direct you to other ways to serve. They may not be the ways you wanted to serve, but ask God to change your heart in that way too. To love the ways that God does set before us to serve.

Let me end with this. Moses was told to command, encourage, and strengthen Joshua for how he would serve. I'd like to do the same for you all. May this passage reveal God's heart of how we should serve our brothers and sisters. This is God's command to us today. But be encouraged. Be strengthened. You don't serve in this way out of your own strength. But out of the strength that comes in Jesus who first served us in this way. By the power of his Spirit, may your heart and actions continue to resemble more and more the sort of sacrificial love he gave us as he went to the cross. Amen.

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