

WHO CAN SERVE THE LORD?  
Joshua 22:5

Intro: There must be dozens of verses in Deuteronomy and in Joshua which are essentially the same as my text: Joshua 22:5. In fact, if you were to abbreviate the messages of Moses to the people of Israel, a verse like this would be a good summary of what he had to say.

And then when Joshua came along, he said the same thing over and over. And it is amazing to see that they did not vary the words that they used. It was not only the same message, but also the same words.

Even the Lord's people would probably have a hard time putting up with such preaching today because we all like variety. Perhaps they did also in Moses' day, but they did not get it. Over and over again Moses told the people to be obedient, to love the Lord, to walk in the Lord's ways. If there was any variety it was in the way in which the people were admonished to be obedient to the Lord. But it all amounted to the same thing.

And to make a strong point even stronger, when their books were written, there you find simply a record of what they had said: Obey the Lord.

Why was this the case? After while you would think that it might have become an aggravation to them.

The reason for all of this was twofold:

- 1) Disobedience was the greatest threat that they faced.  
Think of all of the dangers which the children of Israel faced in their desert wanderings, and after they got into the land. The enemies were strong, more in number than the children of Israel, with cities that had high walls. It was desert country where water was scarce and where food was difficult to find, especially for such a large nation. But the Lord discounted all of the problems. The greatest danger was not from outside, but from within their own hearts--the danger of being disobedient to the will of God.
- 2) Obedience to the will of God was the key to blessing.  
In Deut. 28 Moses had made this perfectly clear to the children of Israel before he died. He had said, "If you obey the Lord, you will be blessed; if you disobey Him, you will be cursed."

And we only have to reflect briefly on the behavior of the children of Israel to know that repeatedly they disobeyed the Lord, and sometimes God dealt very severely with them.

So day after day this is what the children of Israel needed--to

be reminded and to exhorted to obey the Lord. It is apparent that nothing else could satisfy the Lord IF they were not living in obedience to His will.

Now when you mention the commandments, some people are always inclined to think about the 10 commandments. The Jews of our Lord's time of ministry on the earth were basically concerned about one commandment: the Sabbath Day. They were using the Law as a club to keep the people of God in line. That is what a legalist is. But you get nothing of that emphasis when you look at the preaching of Moses and of Joshua. Obedience to the Word of God, all of the commandments, was something that the people were to delight in.

At this point, what was Joshua doing?

He was sending the two and a half tribes back over the Jordan to the land which they had claimed before the people entered Canaan. Moses had told them that they could have that land providing they helped the other tribes in the conquest of Canaan. This they had done. The tribes now had rest. And so the men of Reuben, Gad, and half of the tribe of Manasseh were ready to go back to their families.

What was Joshua's parting word to them?

It was the same that they had heard over and over. Moses had said it. And Joshua followed the preaching of Moses, and said the same things: obey the Lord, obey the Lord!

You can be sure that there was nothing that the children of Israel needed any more, or the Spirit of God would not have had it said so often.

Let us examine the words carefully.

Will you notice that there are six commandments in this verse which really fall into two categories:

- 1) Three of them have to do with the Word of God.
- 2) Three of them have to do with the Lord Himself.

Now we cannot separate the Lord from His Word. In fact, all that we know or can know about the Lord we learn from the Word of God. That has been made clear in the Gospel of John: the Lord is the living Word, and He is revealed in the written Word.

But when we talk about obedience, we must never forget the One to Whom we render our obedience. Moses was not saying that the people had to obey him. They were to obey the Lord. And Joshua's words were just the same. And it is when we see this and keep this before us that obedience becomes a delight. We obey the Lord's servants because they give us the Word of God.

Perhaps the very fact that they are intermingled in our text is evidence that that which has to do with the Word can never be separated from that which has to do with the Lord.

Notice what they are:

I. REGARDING THE WORD OF GOD.

- A. "Take diligent heed to do the commandment and the law."
- B. "To walk in all his ways."
- C. "To keep his commandments."

II. REGARDING THE LORD HIMSELF.

- A. "To love the Lord your God."
- B. "To cleave unto him."
- C. "To serve him with all your heart and with all your soul."

Notice that Joshua was not adding to what the Lord had said through Moses; he was only repeating it. That is the position we are in.

Now Joshua began with the Word, and moved toward the Lord, in what he had to say. And that is what we need to do.

And you can see in the last expression of the verse where Joshua was headed: he was concerned that the people "serve" the Lord. You will remember that this was Joshua's parting challenge to the people before he died. Cf. Joshua 24:15.

Now look at the expressions in the verse in each of the two divisions.

"Take diligent heed" and "keep" are translations of the same verb in the Hebrew. It not only means to observe them, but to preserve them, and to stand guard over them, jealously doing all that God has commanded.

The word suggests that there are forces at work to keep the people of God from obeying the Word of God. These forces were in their own hearts, in the world about them, and over it all was the Enemy of their souls.

"Walk" points to a way of life, not just isolated acts of obedience. Everything in their lives was to be brought into harmony with the Word of God.

But obedience to the Word of God becomes both distasteful and impossible if we lose sight of the Lord.

The commandments are the Lord's. The ways are His ways. The law came from Him.

So, the motive behind our obedience is love for the Lord, and it is also the measure of our love.

Cf. what we had in our SS lesson this morning--practically the same words stated twice in John 14:21, 23.

Cleaving to the Lord is holding fast to Him. Do you do this? Do you realize how much you need Him, that obedience is impossible without Him? Does your prayer life reflect this?

Finally, in obeying the Lord, we are serving Him. That is what our service really is. But how do we serve Him--with our whole heart, and with our whole soul? If we are doing the other things, then this will follow.

Concl: Oh, that the Lord would make us realize how important it is to obey Him?

Some practical suggestions:

- 1) Take a commandment from your Bible reading each day, and ask the Lord to enable you to be obedient in that one thing.
- 2) Or, if you are facing a particular need in your life, see what the Word says about what you should do, and then ask the Lord for enabling grace.

You will find that great blessing will be yours, that the Lord will not only be working in your heart but in the hearts of others, and that you will see His blessing on you in ways that you have never experienced before.