

The One Thing Needed for the Church to Prosper

Joshua 5:13-15

6 March 2022

11:00 AM (Halifax); 3:00 PM (Glenholme & Livestream)

Introduction:

Last week we finished our sermon series on the Song of Solomon.

- In a few weeks, I plan to start a new sermons series in Hebrews.
- But before I do that, I want to have a few sermons on specific topics that I think will be helpful for our congregation at this time.

With our congregational meeting coming up at the end of March, these sermons have (mostly) to do with life in the church.

- Today's sermon, the first one, is actually a "how-to" sermon.
 - It is about the one thing that is needful for the church to prosper.
 - As I am sure you know, lots of books are written offering various techniques that can be used to make the church grow, but this is not about that.
 - First of all, the techniques in popular books may be useful for increasing numbers and even activity, but in many cases, they actually do more harm than good to the actual health of the church as a church that pleases the Lord.
 - We must remember that while we want to reach the lost and see people restored, the letters in Revelation to the seven churches in Asia Minor that were dictated by Jesus show us that growth is not the way to measure prosperity.
 - For example, in writing to the church in Sardis, the Lord instructs:
 - **Rev 3:1: And to the angel of the church in Sardis write, 'These things says He who has the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars: "I know your works, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead."**
 - They were outwardly prosperous, but He goes on to tell them that their works are not pleasing to Him—they are polluted with sin.
 - But then to the church in Philadelphia, He says:
 - **Rev 3:8-11: "I know your works. See, I have set before you an open door, and no one can shut it; for you have a little strength, have kept My word, and have not denied My name. 9 Indeed I will make *those* of the synagogue of Satan, who say they are Jews and are not, but lie—indeed I will make them come and worship before your feet, and to know that I have loved you. 10 Because you have kept My command to persevere, I also will keep you from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth. 11 Behold, I am coming quickly! Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown."**
 - Apparently, outwardly, they had but a little strength—being battered by persecution from the Jews; but in the eyes of the Lord, they were faithful and prospering.
 - The implication is not at all that outward prosperity equals unfaithfulness.

- The point is that the Lord looks at a lot more than outward success when evaluating the state of the church.
- Surely, there are many things He might say about us, both negative and positive.
 - I believe that we have maintained sound doctrine here, along with worship that is biblical. That's one of the main things Jesus talks about in Revelation.
 - He told the church at Ephesus (the first of the seven churches He mentions) that they had retained sound doctrine, but He also charged them with losing their first love—the love they had when they first became a church.
 - I think that could be said about us.
 - However, recently, I have been pleased to see a resurgence of our care for one another.
 - That is a very good thing, but some are still not as engaged.
 - I also have seen some slackness in family worship and in godly living.
 - We are not as zealous about church attendance as we used to be—in attending both of our worship services.
 - With giving, some are very faithful but some are not even tithing.
 - We have a crisis in leadership right now as well—we are in need of elders—
 - What was said to the Hebrews is true of us, that “by this time you ought to be teachers, but you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food”... being babes in Christ.
- And so today I want to point you to the one thing that is needful for prosperity—the one thing that makes a difference for us individually and as a congregation.
 - We already read in Luke 10 about Martha and Mary. I will refer to that as I go along.
 - Now I want to read our primary text—from Joshua 5.
 - I will begin reading in Joshua 5:13.
 - Give careful attention to the word of God.

Joshua 5:13-15: And it came to pass, when Joshua was by Jericho, that he lifted his eyes and looked, and behold, a Man stood opposite him with His sword drawn in His hand. And Joshua went to Him and said to Him, “Are You for us or for our adversaries?”¹⁴ So He said, “No, but as Commander of the army of the LORD I

have now come.” And Joshua fell on his face to the earth and worshiped, and said to Him, “What does my Lord say to His servant?”¹⁵ Then the Commander of the LORD’S army said to Joshua, “Take your sandal off your foot, for the place where you stand is holy.” And Joshua did so.

May the Lord add His blessing to the reading of His holy Word.

- Let's dig in to this passage that we might learn what is needed if we wish to prosper as God's people—which is really the only kind of prosperity there is.
 - All other prosperity is only temporary, and that is not prosperity.

- As Jesus said, if you gain the whole world and lose your own soul, what does it profit you?
- So let's get started.

I. First, to prosper as God's people, we must meet Jesus in our time of need.

A. We see in our text how Joshua encountered Jesus in his time of need.

1. Joshua must have been feeling quite challenged.
 - a. He had been appointed to lead Israel after Moses died.
 - Quite a task!
 - b. He was to lead them into the land that God had promised to give them, the land of Canaan.
 - Here they would have the opportunity to live in harmony with God...
 - That was the whole point of giving them this land.
 - Here, they would be governed by Him as their God.
 - Here, He would provide for them and protect them.
 - No one else was doing this.
 - c. God had called Israel to entirely wipe out all the present inhabitants of Canaan.
 - They were very wicked.
 - God uses floods, famines, fire from heaven, plagues—
 - But this time He appointed Israel to wipe them out.
 - Joshua was to lead them.
 - The cities were formidable (giants, walled cities, trained warriors)
 - Forty years before, Israel had refused to go in for fear
 - It appears that Joshua may have been surveying the city.
 - He is said to be by Jericho, a city fortified with walls.
 - It is the first city they were to take—but how???
2. Jesus comes to Joshua in his time of need.
 - a. He appears to him as a warrior with a sword.
 - **v. 13: And it came to pass, when Joshua was by Jericho, that he lifted his eyes and looked, and behold, a Man stood opposite him with His sword drawn in His hand.**
 - b. This is recognised by the church fathers to be a pre-incarnate manifestation of Jesus.
 - It was not until 1400 years later that He actually became human flesh while continuing to be what He always was—God the Son.
 - He often appears in the Old Testament in human form.
 - Two things make it clear that this is Jesus.
 - He claims to be the Commander of the army of the LORD...
 - Joshua was the earthly commander.
 - This one was sent from heaven.
 - Joshua worships Him and He does not forbid this.
 - This shows that Joshua thought Him to be God
 - This shows that this Man knew Himself to be God

B. It is so like Jesus to make Himself known to us in our time of need in just the way that we need.

1. Here, as a warrior with a sword for the conquest...
 - on Sinai, with thunder,
 - to Isaiah, in holiness,
 - to the whole church, as crucified for our sins.
2. Think how He manifests Himself to us.
 - a. When we see His call to be reconciled to God...
 - We are sinners—desperate, ruined, condemned... smitten by the law.
 - He appears as a Saviour crucified.
 - He appears as the One who washes away our sins by His Spirit
 - b. When we see His calling for His church to bring the whole world into perfect harmony with God.
 - How can we do such a thing? The world hates God, they are lost in sin...
 - We feel our weakness...
 - He appears as the risen, reigning, exalted Lord who has all authority in heaven and earth.

➤ To prosper as God’s people, you must see your need and you must see Him and look to Him as your Saviour.

- That’s the first thing we see from this text.

II. **Second, having seen Jesus as Saviour and Lord, we must then make sure that we are on His side.**

A. When Joshua first encounters Him, he asks Him whose side He is on.

- v. 13 (the end) says, **And Joshua went to Him and said to Him, “Are You for us or for our adversaries?”**
1. This is a reasonable question.
 - He is in the appearance of a man
 - He is there with a drawn sword...
 - Joshua wants to know if he has come to fight him.
 2. It appears to be a bold question.
 - Joshua appears to be ready to take Him on.

B. The man’s response is “No.”

- **So He said, “No, but as Commander of the army of the LORD I have now come.”**
1. He says “no” to an “or” question!
 - the point is, He is not on either side.
 2. He has come as the Commander of the Lord’s army—
 - He is, as we have seen, Jesus, the Son of God.
 - He has come to do the Lord’s work, not the work of man...
 - God is never here to do the will of man.

C. This reveals an important axiom to us: The issue is never whether the LORD is on our side, but always whether we are on His side.

1. It is wrong to ask Him if He is on our side.
 - That's what pagan religion does.
 - You decide what you want and then you look to the gods to give it to you.
 - You learn techniques to get them to what you want.
2. The Lord does not side with man.
 - He sets the agenda.
 - He calls us to align with Him.
 - If we do, then He is willing and able to help us.
3. The great question then is this: Are you with Him, or not?
 - You will not prosper unless you are on His side.

TRANS> So to summarise what we have seen so far,

- We will only prosper when we look to Jesus as the Saviour we need and when we are on His side.

III. What does it look like to be on His side?

A. Joshua presents us here with a beautiful example.

1. As soon as he knew that the man with the sword was the LORD, Joshua responded accordingly.
 - We do not fault him for asking if the man was on his side before he knew who the man was.
 - But if he had asked it after he knew, we would have cause to blame him.
2. Joshua does two appropriate things when he knows it is the LORD.
 - He worships Him.
 - v. 14 (middle): **And Joshua fell on his face to the earth and worshiped,**
 - He submits to Him.
 - v. 14 (end): **and said to Him, "What does my Lord say to His servant?"**
3. Worship and submission go hand in hand.
 - When you worship Him, you acknowledge Him as God who is far above you, who is worthy of all honour. You praise Him for His majesty and glory, for His wisdom and perfections, for His holiness and justice, for His mercy and love.
 - You love Him and adore Him as the beautiful and perfect one.
 - You reverence Him as the one who has all authority and who judges the world.
 - You affirm that you exist for Him—for His pleasure.
 - And therefore, you submit to Him—"What does my Lord say to His servant?"
 - You want Him to guide you, to instruct you, to teach you about Himself.
 - You put yourself in His hands to do whatever pleases Him because He is God.
 - This is how a man lives rightly before God—in harmony with God.
 - He worships and he yields himself to God.

B. Jesus expresses His approval of what Joshua has done.

1. He accepts the worship.
 - Bowing down to Him the way Joshua does would not be appropriate behaviour for a creature, but it is the only appropriate behaviour toward God.
2. Jesus not only accepts the worship, but calls for more of it.
 - V. 15 says: **Then the Commander of the LORD’S army said to Joshua, “Take your sandal off your foot, for the place where you stand is holy.” And Joshua did so.**
 - It is as if to say, “Give me yet more honour. You have bowed down, but take off your shoes also. the ground is holy because I am here.
 - “It is only right that you should venerate me with the highest honour, for I am God and should be treated as God.”
3. Jesus approved of similar behaviour in Mary—in Luke 10:38-42 which we read before.
 - We are told that Mary sat at His feet and heard His word.
 - She honoured Him in this way, but Martha, her sister, criticized her.
 - When Martha did this: **And Jesus answered and said to her [Luke 10:41-42], “Martha, Martha, you are worried and troubled about many things. ⁴² But one thing is needed, and Mary has chosen that good part, which will not be taken away from her.”**
 - Worshipping Jesus and submitting to Him is the one thing needed!
 - That is quite a strong statement.
 - As sinners, ruined by the fall, we are completely out of harmony with our Creator—we are bent and twisted—a distortion of the beautiful creatures He made us to be, chiefly because our relationship with Him is spoiled.
 - We are not worshipping Him who made us to be worshippers—
 - Worshipping God is simply the right thing for creatures like us to do.
 - To fail to do it is to get everything wrong.
 - It is to be barren, empty, defiled, even repulsive—because He is worthy.
 - We will find no satisfaction outside of Him, only frustration.

C. We must follow this example! See that you worship Him and yield to Him.

 1. See that your whole life is about glorifying Him and doing whatever pleases Him.
 - a. While we are in this fallen world, it means coming to Jesus that He might restore us as God’s worshipers who love Him and live for Him.
 - There are hard things that must be done here because we are being delivered from our sin and we are in a sinful world that has rebelled against God.
 - There are many things to suffer, many hardships to bear, many denials.
 - b. As you live each day, say, “I am here for you, Lord.
 - “You are God. My life is yours. I am here for your praise and glory.”
 - When trouble comes, bow to Jesus and ask Him to speak to you, to help you bear it, to honour Him in bearing it.

- Look to Him to learn how to love your wife or your husband, your children, your parents, your siblings.
 - Ask Him how He wants you to do your work—how you can better please Him in it.
 - Seek to please Him in your prayer and your praise, both in public and in private—come to His word, not half heartedly, but whole heartedly.
 - Do you see? Be for Him! That is what life is.
 - That is the life that Jesus restores in our salvation—life with God as God, life for God as our God, a life lived to please Him.
- c. This will transform your life.
- It will put an end to doubt, to emptiness, to aimlessness—you are here for Him.
 - It will put an end to whining and complaining.
 - It will put an end to ungodly anger and bitterness...
 - When something happens to make you angry, your response will be, “Lord, what response will please you—not how can I vent my passion.”
 - So you will do with your sinful lust: “What do you want, Lord?”
 - Worry and anxiety will go—because you will stop clinging on to your own desires and yield yourself to His—as God.
 - Does He want you to endure loss? Then you will do it for His glory.
 - What joy, what fulfillment, what happiness, what assurance will be yours.
 - How your love and peace will grow because you will be living in harmony with God.
 - Yes, bow in worship to the LORD and find out what He wants in all of life.
 - Let me add, that we learn what He wants from His word.
 - Don’t go by your feelings—
 - Do as Joshua did and ask Him to speak to you as His servant.
 - Our society teaches us to live by our feelings, but we are rather to live by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.
 - And don’t get the idea that doing that will lead to a dreary life.
 - That doing the will of God will mean depriving yourself of food, sex, going to the moon, collecting and creating beautiful things...
 - That is a doctrine of demons.
 - The Lord delights in giving us beautiful and pleasant things.
 - Yes, in this world there will be times when we will be deprived of these things to honour Him through suffering,
 - but in the end, He will fill us with good things.
 - What He opposes is making idols out these things that rather ought to fill us with gratitude to Him.
 - His ultimate goal in saving us is to bring us back into harmony with Him as our Creator.
 - And that means wholeness and fullness, joy and pure happiness. It means being lost in loving adoration of our Maker.

2. We are also called to bring others to Jesus that they might be reconciled to God.
 - We are to tell them that God calls us to be reconciled to Him as His worshipping obedient servants and that to do otherwise is a great evil.
 - We are to plead with them and we are to plead with God for them.
 - Our ultimate goal is to see them honour our God who is worthy to be praised— which, like us, they can only do by coming to Jesus to be saved.
 - Coming to Him as God and yielding to Him—
 - That is the one thing that is needful.
 - That is the good part.
 - See that you choose it.