

Being Loyal

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Did you know that no two dogs have the same nose print? We have finger prints; dogs have nose prints. A dog doesn't sweat like we do. However, they do sweat through their paw pads. Every dog has three eyelids to keep their eyes safe and wet. Dogs dream like humans do. A dog's nose has up to 300 million smell parts while we humans have 6 million smell parts in our nose. The other item we know about dogs is their loyalty to their owner. Movies and shows have been made about dogs. We had Lassie and how devoted he was to Timmy. We had Rin Tin Tin and of course we had the Walt Disney movie Old Yeller. A dog that helped a family through some tough times. For most people, a dog is a loyal animal. They're always happy to see you and they'll usually defend you when needed. The opposite can be said of humans. Most humans are not loyal. If you need a quick example, how about our government. Most of them are only loyal to themselves. We've been talking about being salt and light (daylight) to the world around us. Jesus wants us to be good salt and daylight. Last week, we talked about how we need a willing heart to be salt and light. We can't just do it because we think we have to. God's Spirit can help us to have a willing heart to serve. That is the driving force, but what keeps us from losing that willing heart? Age, events, sickness, and many other things can help to make us lose that willing heart. I came across some Scripture last week during devotions that really made me think about what helps to keep us in check, not just in having a willing heart, but also having a good growing relationship with the Lord – the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. We're going to look at this Scripture this morning.

Let's turn to Hosea 6: 4-6 where we read this, "What shall I do with you, Ephraim?

What shall I do with you, Judah?

For your loyalty is like a morning cloud,

And like the dew which goes away early.

⁵ Therefore I have cut *them* in pieces by the prophets;

I have slain them by the words of My mouth;
And the judgments on you are *like* the light *that* ^[a]shines.
⁶ For I ^[b]desire loyalty rather than sacrifice,
And the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings.

(NASB – www.biblegateway.com)

If you remember, Hosea was the prophet that God had asked to marry a prostitute which was to show the people of Judah and Israel how their relationship with God was like. Israel and Judah had split apart as a country after the death of King Solomon, but both had a hard time being faithful to God. So, God would have His prophets do strange things to get the attention of the Israelites. So, here in this Scripture, God is speaking to Ephraim, which is another name for Israel, and He is speaking to Judah as well. In verse 6, the Lord tells them that He would rather have their loyalty and their knowledge of Him more than their sacrifices. One of the main reasons Israel and Judah kept falling away from the Lord was because they lacked loyalty to God and they didn't have knowledge or understood God and His character. How can you be salt and daylight to this world if you are not loyal to the Lord and don't have knowledge of Him? You can't. So, let's take a closer look at these two items that God wants from Israel and Judah other than their empty sacrifices. First, let's look at being loyal to God. The Lord let's Israel know in verse 4 that their loyalty is like a morning cloud which goes away. In other words, they may be loyal in the morning, but by the afternoon they don't care about pleasing God. This is not like a dog that every time they see you, their tail is wagging a hundred miles per hour, slobber is coming out of their mouth, and they're trying to jump on you. Israel is more like a cat here. They'll let you pet them in the morning and maybe for the rest of the day they have nothing to do with you. Israel has a loyalty issue for God in their life. They were only loyal when God was needed. So, God let's them know in verse 6 that He wants their loyalty. Now, depending what translation you are using, different terms are used for "loyalty". It could be goodness or it could be mercy. I looked up the Hebrew term used in verse 4 and 6. In both verses, the same Hebrew term is used which is "Hesed" which means: Loyal love, devotion, covenant relationship (Strong's Concordance). This is very important; the same Hebrew term is used in both verses. Both mercy and goodness come from loyal love, but this is a Hebrew term with a strong meaning. God wanted loyal love from His people. This was love that was loyal through whatever time Israel was

going through – good or bad. It’s easier to try to get close to God when things are going bad. When things are going well, it’s easier to forget about the Lord. So, this loyal love would take strong devotion from the people. Devotion means this: deep love, loyalty, or care for a person, activity, or cause (AI). Look how we act with our favorite sports teams or hobbies. We are devoted to them. For hobbies, we try to collect the best or we try to improve how we make things or collect things or grow things. We make sure we spend time in our hobbies as much as possible. For those who have a favorite sports team, try to cheer on a different team. My team is the Pittsburgh Pirates and they get me mad weekly. However, I’ve tried to become a fan of a different team – I can’t do it. I’m loyal to that bad organization. When I get mad, I try to avoid looking on my phone box scores. I may be able to do it one day, but the next day I have to look to see what is going on. I’m I as devoted to Jesus as I am to my baseball team or as I am to certain hobbies? If we go back to the Hebrew term “Hesed” it adds “covenant relationship”. We are devoted through this covenant relationship with Jesus. In the Old Testament, God had made more than one covenant with the people. We find it in the Adam and Eve story and the Noah story. Plus, we see it in the Abraham story where God make a covenant with Abraham and his people. God was always loyal / faithful to that covenant which connected to the covenant at the cross which we are part of today. God has always and will always be loyal and faithful to His covenant. The problem is us. Those who have been part of the Wednesday night Bible study have been witness to how hard it was for Israel to be faithful / loyal to God in the Book of Numbers. God wanted Israel to be devoted to Him because He was devoted to them out of love for them. God wants us to be loyal, devoted, and faithful to Him today because we are part of the covenant of the cross. You won’t see the term “loyal” in the New Testament – depending on the translation, but you will see a term used more often – faith. Paul states this in Galatians 5: ²² But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. ²⁴ Now those who ^[a]belong to Christ Jesus crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.

²⁵ If we live by the Spirit, let’s follow the Spirit as well. ²⁶ Let’s not become boastful, challenging one another, envying one another. (NASB – www.biblegateway.com)

Faith in Jesus means we believe in Him and we trust Him. In Greek here, that is what the term means. If you believe in someone, if you trust someone, you want

to be loyal and devoted to that someone. It was so hard for Israel to be loyal to God in the Old Testament. The evidence is there in print. This is why Jesus will send us the Holy Spirit to help us to have faith in Him, which at the same time will help us to be loyal and devoted to Him. We can't do this on our own. If we are not loyal to Jesus, we can't be daylight and good salt in the world today. Why?

If we are not loyal / faithful to Jesus, we will not have the knowledge of Him. If we go back to Hosea, God tells Israel that He rather have their knowledge of Him over their burnt offerings during worship. He says this after saying about wanting them to be loyal. What does it mean to have knowledge of God? I'm glad you ask. Let's look for a moment in Isaiah 61: 1-2 where Scripture states,

"61 The Spirit of the Lord ^[a]God is upon me,
Because the LORD anointed me
To bring good news to the humble;
He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted,
To proclaim ^[b]release to captives
And ^[c]freedom to prisoners;
²To proclaim the favorable year of the LORD
And the day of vengeance of our God;
To comfort all who mourn,

(NASB – www.biblegateway.com)

Now this is Scripture from the Old Testament. Let's see where it is used again. Let's now turn to Luke 4: 14-30 where we read this, ¹⁴And Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news about Him spread through all the surrounding region. ¹⁵And He *began* teaching in their synagogues and was praised by all.

¹⁶And He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up; and as was His custom, He entered the synagogue on the Sabbath, and stood up to read. ¹⁷And the scroll of Isaiah the prophet was handed to Him. And He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written:

¹⁸ "THE SPIRIT OF THE LORD IS UPON ME,
BECAUSE HE ANOINTED ME TO BRING GOOD NEWS TO THE POOR.
HE HAS SENT ME TO PROCLAIM RELEASE TO CAPTIVES,
AND RECOVERY OF SIGHT TO THE BLIND,

TO SET FREE THOSE WHO ARE OPPRESSED,
19 TO PROCLAIM THE FAVORABLE YEAR OF THE LORD.”

20 And He rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down; and the eyes of all *the people* in the synagogue were intently directed at Him. 21 Now He began to say to them, “Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your ^[a]hearing.” 22 And all *the people* were ^[b]speaking well of Him, and admiring the ^[c]gracious words which were coming from His ^[d]lips; and yet they were saying, “Is this not Joseph’s son?” 23 And He said to them, “No doubt you will ^[e]quote this proverb to Me: ‘Physician, heal yourself! All *the miracles that* we heard were done in Capernaum, do here in Your hometown as well.’” 24 But He said, “Truly I say to you, no prophet is welcome in his hometown. 25 But I say to you in truth, there were many widows in Israel in the days of Elijah, when the sky was shut up for three years and six months, when a ^[f]severe famine came over all the land; 26 and yet Elijah was sent to none of them, but *only* to ^[g]Zarephath, *in the land* of Sidon, to a woman who was a widow. 27 And there were many with leprosy in Israel in the time of Elisha the prophet; and none of them was ^[h]cleansed, but *only* Naaman the Syrian.” 28 And all *the people* in the synagogue were filled with rage as they heard these things; 29 and they got up and drove Him out of the city, and brought Him to the ^[i]crest of the hill on which their city had been built, so that they could throw Him down from the cliff. 30 But He passed through their midst and went on His way. (NASB – www.biblegateway.com)

Here we have Jesus going to a synagogue to read Scripture on the Jewish Sabbath. Jesus read the Scripture we had read earlier from Isaiah 61. After Jesus was done, He rolled the scroll back up and told the people in that synagogue, who were there to hear the Word of God, that this Scripture had come true today before their eyes. Then Jesus gets critical with them by saying in a nutshell that God sometimes reaches out to the Gentiles because of Israel’s unbelief. Then we read that they try to throw Jesus off a cliff, but His time had not come yet and He walked away. The people in the synagogue had no knowledge of God. If they would have, they would have understood what Jesus meant and this is why it is so important to be filled with the Holy Spirit because we receive knowledge of God which actually takes a lifetime through the Spirit. You can never stop learning about God no matter how old you get. If they had knowledge of God, they would not have tried to kill Him since Jesus is the Son of God. How do we know many Christians today are not loyal? They lack knowledge of the Lord. Not only do we get knowledge of God through the Bible, but we get it through the working of the

Holy Spirit that Paul talked about in Galatians. It is part of the fruit of the Spirit. When we receive knowledge of God, we'll understand love and compassion better. When we receive knowledge of God, we'll know what is right and what is wrong. When we receive knowledge of God, we'll better understand the evil of sin. When we receive knowledge of God, we'll better understand the cross which in turn will create in us a loyalty for Jesus because we'll better understand the horror of the cross that Jesus went through for you and me. The loneliness that Jesus must have gone through because of our sin that He carried is hard for me to imagine. The more we gain knowledge of the Trinity, the more loyal we'll become out of love for Him. The lack of knowledge of God has become a great concern within the Church today. Many are no different from Israel in the Old Testament or those that were in the synagogue to hear Jesus. If they knew Him, they would love Him and would not want to sin. However, we see today many have allowed the culture to block their mind from knowledge of Jesus and who He is – the Son of God. If Jesus was standing here today, maybe He would quote Hosea in a different way

⁶ For I ^[b]desire loyalty rather than sacrifice,
And the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings. (Actual Scripture from Hosea)

For I desire loyalty rather than your worship

And the knowledge of God rather than your singing (Just my paraphrase)

To be salt and daylight to this world, we need to be loyal/faithful to Jesus and we need to always continue to gain knowledge of Him through the Holy Spirit. Let's ask Jesus to help us to be more loyal and give us more knowledge of and about Him. If we really desire this, Jesus will tell the Holy Spirit to help us to be more loyal and knowledgeable of the Trinity. Then, we will not lose our flavor nor will our daylight become dim for Jesus in this dying world. We should be more loyal to the Lord, than a dog is to its master.

The Strongest Strong's Concordance. Zondervan: Grand Rapids, 2001