

Sermon for Sunday, May 13, 1973 by Andrew A. Jumper, D. D., Pastor
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"WHAT'S GOING ON AT YOUR HOUSE?"

Joshua 24:1-15

Text: "And if you be unwilling to serve the Lord, choose this day whom you will serve...but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord." Joshua 24:15

After the Jews left Egypt they wandered in the wilderness for forty years. Then, even after they entered the promised land, it was many years before they began to urbanize and settle in large cities to any extent. During those years they lived a simple life, following their flocks from place to place. They had no traffic, no telephone, no television. They had no little league, no Junior League, no golf courses. But they did have a closely knit fellowship where every person belonged. There was little outside distraction to fragment or fracture their lives. But as their society became fairly sophisticated and urbanized, things began to change. They no longer dwelt in tents, but in walled cities. They no longer took care of their own needs, but each became involved in the specialization so necessary to a large society. They no longer lived in isolation, but mingled with peoples of others races and nations and religions. And this new life began to take its spiritual toll. It was out of these dramatically changed circumstances that Joshua gathered them together on the plains of Schechem and spoke to them, "Choose this day whom you will serve...but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord."

In the rapidly changing world in which you and I live, is not this still the dramatic choice that confronts the family and parents today? A modern writer has written, "The family is a covenant with posterity." That's pretty profound, isn't it? The home is the cradle into which the future is born. It is the nursery in which the new world is being reared. What will tomorrow be like? What sort of world will our children and our children's children have? In a large sense that decision is being made right now by the sort of families we are.

I bring to the pulpit this morning some things that are heavy on my heart. Recent religious articles in the newspapers tell of declining church attendance and that fewer and fewer people think religion is important. I know our own church attendance and Sunday School attendance is not down. We do not yet seem to be reflecting the national trend. Nevertheless, I want to ask us parents some questions this morning. I want to ask why many of us do not have our children in church school regularly? Is it that Christian education is no longer important? I want to ask the parents of young people, why is it many of our youth are not a part of the evening youth program. What other things could possibly be more important? Now, I know young people. They will complain. They will say they don't like the teacher. They will say the material is not good. They will say they are bored. But kids are like that. And let me ask us parents this, where else will they get anything like Christian education and Christian training? Are we providing anything better as a substitute?

One of the most important responsibilities we parents have is to lead our children to Christ. When Andrew heard Jesus preach the first time, he became convinced that Jesus was the Messiah for whom Israel had long waited. The Bible says of Andrew that he "First findeth his own brother Simon, and saith unto him, we have found the Messiah...And he brought him to Jesus."

To bring your own family to Jesus is not easy. Someone has said that "The place where the reality of a man's religion is tested the most is in his own home." That is certainly true. Pierre Loti tells us in his autobiography how, as a small boy, he aspired to become a saint. In his young boy's heart he resolved to copy Simeon Stylites who lived atop a stone pillar for forty years and won for himself a great reputation for piety and sanctity. Young Pierre mounted a stool in the kitchen

and announced his plan to remain there for forty years. His mother took a rather dim view of his piety and sanctity and would have none of it. An hour after his career as a saint had started it had ended and he recorded in his diary, "Thus I discovered that it is exceedingly difficult to be a saint while living with your own family."

Do you remember the story in the Bible of Jesus healing the man named Legion who had many demons? When the man was healed and seated at the feet of Jesus, clothed--and as the Bible puts it--in his right mind, he told Jesus he wanted to go with him as a disciple. But do you remember what Jesus said to him? He said, "Go home to thy friends, and tell them how great things the Lord hath done for thee, and hath had compassion on thee." Yes, the first place Jesus calls on us to share our faith is in our own families. It is there--in the home with our own family--that our first duty lies. I think when I stand before God on that Judgment Day, that I had rather be able to number my own family as converts than any one else.

Do you remember the story of Noah of the flood and the ark fame? Did you know that he preached 120 years and made only seven converts in all that time? But do you know who he converted--his own family! When he got to heaven he could look around and see all of his children there. I wonder this morning if all of us will be able to do that. And how are you going to feel and how are you going to explain it to God if some of your own family is missing? I tell you, when we keep our children out of church school and out of worship services for small or pretended reasons, we are preaching them a sermon they won't forget. When we have time for bridge and golf and the country club and social activities and community affairs but don't have time or energy for God, we are telling our children an awful lot. When we have ample money for everything except the church, we are writing columns for our children to read. Yes, the first field of evangelism is the home and the day of Judgment will be a sad time indeed if our own children and loved ones are not there because we have failed them. Today is a time for parents to choose, to make a decision about their family and Jesus.

A second important duty we parents have is not only to lead our children to Jesus but also to help them grow as Christians. There is a story about a man who fell off a street car. The people rushed to pick him up and help him if he was injured. You can tell it is an old story because somebody went to help him! "How in the world," they asked him, "did you happen to fall off?" "Well," he replied, "I guess I was just standing too close to where I got on." Is not the church the place where we grow in knowledge and understanding? Is not the church the place where we come to draw strength and courage for living through worship and communion with God? And if many of us get away from the church and become inactive in it is it perhaps because we stand too close to where we got on--that we aren't growing? Do many of our families on the church roll suddenly lose their faith--or rather do they just drift away and gradually lose it? Are you standing pretty close to where you got on this morning?

If you don't know here is a little test you can give yourself. Answer yes or no. Are you trying to be a better person than you were a year ago or a week ago? Do you know more about the Bible, more about Jesus, more about God's will for your life than you did a year ago? If you cannot answer yes to all of those, then you are standing too close to where you got on.

Let me share a story with you. Some of you will think it is real "cornball" but I want to share it because it is a true story and illustrates a truth about life and about families. Back in the early years of our country five young men set out from the same town in western Pennsylvania for the great Northwest. Some years later when they returned home, four of them were tremendously changed. They were pitiful examples of the hard and wild and undisciplined life of the frontier when a life

has no resistance to the evils and temptations of men. But the fifth came back spiritually mature and strong. When asked to explain it, he said it was the picture he carried in his heart. And what was the picture? It was the picture of his last breakfast at home. As always his father got out the Bible, but his eyes filled with tears as he tried to read, knowing that the ties of home and family would never be the same again as their son left home. The mother took the Bible from his hand and read. Then, as always, the family knelt to pray and the father began. His voice choked up and the mother took up the prayer, "We thank Thee for our son and that we are able to send him out into the world pure and clean. May his feet never stray from the paths of virtue and purity and truth." "It was this picture," said the young man, "that I carried in my heart--the vision of a Godly home and a precious prayer. In those years in the northwest I could not bear the thought of breaking the heart of my father and mother nor of dishonoring my Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ whom they had taught me to love."

Yes, choose this day whom you will serve...but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord." Let me ask you just one final question this morning. If it were a crime to be a Christian, and if you and your family were on trial for being Christians--would there be enough evidence to convict you?