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JUST GIVE IT TO THE LORD – *NOT EXACTLY!* Michael B. Beough
Numbers 33:50-56; Philippians 2:12-13 September 13, 2009
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Have you ever been told that if you just give it to the Lord, everything will work out? I have heard that my whole life. It is akin to the notion of just praying your troubles away.

But this morning I want to take issue with this half-truth. It can drive you crazy. It can make you lazy. It can make matters worse instead of better. It might even cause you to give up on God.

Henry Cloud and John Townsend, Christian psychologists and authors of the books on boundaries, tell about Jane. She came to one of them with depression. She had suffered from it for years. She was a committed and active Christian, but could never overcome it. She had memorized scripture, she had prayed, she had tried meditation, she had tried giving it to the Lord.

Instead, her sense of guilt and failure had grown. She became angry with God. She wondered why God hadn't healed it.

Here is what Jane had to learn. **Just giving it to the Lord is not enough. In the words of the Apostle Paul in Philippians 2, you have to "work out your own salvation with fear and trembling".**

Now the good Presbyterians among you are thinking, "Wait just a minute! We can't save ourselves. We are saved by grace through faith, and not by works lest anyone should boast."

Well, yes, obviously that is true. The Bible says so in Ephesians 2. We cannot save ourselves from our sin. We cannot overcome the sin that separates us from God and from each other. The good news is that God has done that for us. Our salvation is a gift from God given to us in Jesus Christ who took our sins upon himself and paid the price we owe. We are no longer under condemnation. It is all from God.

However, there is more to the biblical message. There is more to Jesus. Jesus didn't die just to resolve our relationship with God and get us into heaven. He didn't do it for us so we could sit back and relax and wait for the worm to turn or heaven to arrive on earth. He did it to empower us to take on the hard work of working out the rest of our own salvation with fear and trembling. You see, what Jesus accomplished assures us that God has a place for us in the heavenly realms. God has provided us with every spiritual blessing. But **scripture also teaches that we must go and possess what he has secured.**

Look at Numbers 33:50-56. Moses has been leading the Israelites for almost 40 years to the Promised Land. The Promised Land is before them as a guarantee from God. They have the assurance from God that this blessing is theirs. They can already taste the milk and honey that they will find there.

The only problem is that the land is occupied by people who worship false gods. The Israelites will have to go in and drive out all the inhabitants and destroy their gods. If the Israelites fail to do this and allow the false gods to remain, it says in verses 55 & 56, "they shall trouble you in the land where you are settling. And I will do to you as I thought to do to them."

This morning we are not talking about taking over someone else's land. We are talking about dealing with the emotional and spiritual deficiencies that sink our ship of state.

Here is my assumption this morning. Every one of us has emotional and spiritual deficiencies. They come with the territory. We are who we are because of a complex of factors that we had no control over. These deficiencies get played out in our relations with others. They keep showing up in the most inopportune times. They are like rocks hidden beneath the ocean waves, unseen until we crash into them or until someone else crashes into them. We do our best to steer our ship of state around them, to avoid them. Or we may try to ignore them. Or we might even try to give them all to the Lord.

I believe most of us know that we have emotional and spiritual stumbling blocks. Some of us are consciously suffering right now the pain caused by them. We are in turmoil, confused, lost. We wish things could be different.

The bottom line is that things can be different if we are willing to do the hard work.

We have to go beneath the surface. We have to go into the land of our souls. We have to go where it is sometimes dark and scary, into that inner place where we don't like what we see and don't know what to do with it. We have to go in there like crawling into a cave where unknown things are hidden.

Remember that scene from Star Wars? Luke Skywalker goes into a cave. Out of the shadows steps Darth Vader. They begin to clash their light sabers. Finally, Luke knocks that hideous black mask off Darth Vader. Now he will see who this evil presence is. When Luke looks, he is stunned to see his own face. Luke is in training to be a Jedi warrior. He has to go deep inside himself to see what's there, to recognize the dark side of his own soul.

Like Luke, we have to go into that cave and start clearing it out. We have to go in there and work out our salvation, to let the healing power of

God's grace work its way into the emotional and spiritual deficiencies that trouble us.

Sounds like fun, doesn't it?

Now, here is what I have been saving to the last.

The healing of our emotional and spiritual deficiencies is never a solo activity. Our Presbyterian insistence that we are saved by grace means just that. Healing comes from outside us. The word "you" in Philippians 2:12-13 is plural. It means "you all." "You all" must work out your salvation together with fear and trembling. Or as we say in Texas, "Ya'll". Working out your own salvation is a group project.

Last Sunday, youth and parents met to begin planning for Youth Ministry this year. We started talking about the goals of our Youth Ministry. One of the youth spoke up and said it is about building community. That seemed to strike a chord in everyone in the room and it ended up as one of the three goals - building community, having fun, and doing missions.

Even our youth know the importance of being in community. I am glad they didn't say "building our group" because you can have a group but no community. Community means connection, belonging, identity, trust, support. It means somebody has my back. It means accountability, having others who will help keep me on track, who will go with me into the depths and help me see what I don't want to see.

Then someone said we ought to have a covenant that youth sign to show that they are committed to this community. And someone said the youth ought to create the covenant, and that's what they are going to do. Covenant means I can depend on you. You are not going to flake out on me when I need you the most, and I am not going to flake out on you.

Do you want to grow emotionally and spiritually? It's a group project. It may take professional therapy if you are struggling with chronic bouts of depression or anger or fear. But most of us can grow to new places in our hearts if we just do the hard work of being in community with others who are wanting the same thing.

I think the greatest thing we have ever done as a church in our ten short years is to start Growth Groups. I have personally grown in ways that I frankly resisted for many years of my ministry. I still have to go into the land and let others help drive out the false gods and tear down the old altars that I keep crashing into. I know I can't do it by myself. I still worry about things, and get frustrated, but I don't try to hold it in and pretend everything is okay. I let others into my life because I know that's where the grace comes from. Grace comes from the community.

So, our youth put their finger on it for me. Why would I want all your children to participate in the Sunday Morning Christian Education? So they can experience community where emotional and spiritual growth takes place. Why do I want all your teenagers to be a part of our Youth Ministry? So they can experience community as a gift from God and a place where they can work out their salvation, like the rest of us, with fear and trembling.

“Just give it to the Lord” sounds so Christian. But it is only half the truth. Let us go in together, ya’ll, and take the land the Lord our God has promised us.