

Loving God Through Keeping His Ordinances

I told the story to the men's group Wednesday night: We have an old church in up town Harrisburg that has been dying. The Conference has sent many pastors there over the past 30 years to try to breathe new life into it, but all our efforts at renewal at the Green Street Church of God have failed. The 1/2 dozen people who remain can no longer pay the heat and the light bill and recently told the Conference that they cannot continue. The building is in need of many repairs, and it doesn't make good stewardship for the Conference to try to repair or maintain the building for the few people who remain. We made the sad decision last month to officially close the Green Street Church of God. Pastor George Jensen, who serves as the secretary of the Renewal Commission, was instructed to seek a way for us to be free of the building before next winter.

As a part of fulfilling his assignment Pastor George met with a prospective buyer, to inspect the property and to explore the possibility of selling it. Pastor George's wife was at work, so George took his 8 and 12-year-old daughters with him to the meeting. On their way into the building an elderly woman who lives next door wanted to know if the church was still offering services, and even though George believed the church to be closing in two weeks, he told her, "yes," the church was still meeting and that she would be very welcome to attend.

On their way home from the meeting George's 12 year old daughter Tiffany, turned to him and said: "Daddy, you can't let them close that church. The churches are God's body and every time you close a church it's like cutting off a part of the body." George was cut to the heart by the words of his daughter and prayed urgently to God: He prayed that the church would remain open and that it would remain open as a Church of God.

A few days later George was introduced to Dwayne and Cathy Coleman, who have gathered together a worshipping

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community of over 60 people. It just so happens that they have felt called to minister in uptown Harrisburg and have been praying that God would give them a place to meet right where our Green Street Church is located. As George was meeting with them he asked them about their beliefs and discovered that they believe what we believe. They even wash feet. George went out on a limb at the prompting of the Holy Spirit. He said, "How about this: Why don't you join with us as a Church of God, and we will give you the building."

As of this past week's meeting of the Conference Administrative Council, everything is a go. Just to be cautious, rather than give them the building outright, it was decided to lease it to them for a \$1 a year, until Dwayne and Cathy can be approved by our Commission on Church Vocations and until their church's relationship with the Conference has been firmly established. But, at least for now it looks like the Green Street Church of God has been given a new lease on life. The old church that had no members under 60 years old, will be filled with a congregation of new believers, whose oldest members are 50. The pastor and worship leader are 50. Everybody else is younger. The whole thing was turned around as the Holy Spirit spoke through Tiffany Jensen who is only 12 years old. It's fun and exciting to be serving on the Conference Commission on Renewal when I can hear stories like this one. God is good and answers the prayers of His children.

But I want to return to something Pastor Jensen said to us in his telling of the story. George said, "and they even wash feet!" Of course, George mentioned that because of the three Ordinances recognized by the Churches of God, the feet washing is the most controversial. Even some of our regular pastors have difficulty affirming Feet Washing as an Ordinance of the Church. But what do we mean by "Ordinance" anyway, and why do we observe any of them? The simple answer to that question or to both these questions is "Jesus." More specifically, an Ordinance is anything of a ritual nature that Jesus commanded His

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followers to carry out in His name and in His memory. We baptize new believers, wash feet, and eat the bread and drink the wine of the Lord's Supper because Jesus said so. These things are, first and foremost, simple acts of obedience to God. We love God through Worship, through paying attention to and obeying His word, and by observing His Ordinances as He told us to do.

Notice the simple phrase "as He told us to do." When Jesus came to John the Baptist to be Baptized, John objected. John said, "I should be baptized by you not you by me." But in Matthew 3:15, Jesus replied, "Let it be so now; it is proper for us **to do this** to fulfill all righteousness." Regarding Feet washing, Jesus said, "If you know these things happy are you **if you do them.**" Regarding the Lord's Supper or Communion, Jesus said, "**This do** in remembrance of me." The Ordinances are something that **we do** to express our love for God: They are very action oriented. **We do these things in obedience to the command of Jesus. And, when we do these things we are blessed.**

There is something that has been coming through to me from the Lord over the past couple of weeks that is changing my perspective and has the potential to revolutionize my life and our ministry. For many years now, I have understood and appreciated the message of John 15, where Jesus talks about Himself being the vine and we are the branches. I know from that, that it is very important for us to remain intimately connected to Him, the Vine, and have understood that without Him, we can do nothing significant in the Kingdom of God. In other words, we need Him to guide and to help us in all we do.

But the part of the puzzle of discipleship that is finally getting through this thick scull of mine is that Jesus is Lord, Master, and the King. It's not just a matter of me needing His strength to do what I think I should do for Him. Rather, it's a matter of me hearing what He wants me to do for Him and then receiving His strength and blessing in the midst of

my obedience, in the midst of **doing it**. And, though it may not sound like it at first, there is a huge distinction between these two approaches.

In the first approach, I call the shots. I do what I think I should do for Him and ask for His strength, wisdom, and grace to do it, which makes it sound very Christian and very holy. The fly in the ointment in this approach is that I am still calling the shots. In the second approach, Jesus, through the working of the Holy Spirit, is calling the shots. And He helps me to do what He tells me to do when I step out in faith to obey Him. **Obedience precedes the blessing.**

In the two passages of Scripture I read in your hearing this morning, we see this principle firmly in place. Joseph, by his faithfulness to God, was made regent in all of Egypt at a time of famine. By God's revelation and instruction, Joseph built silos and collected grain for storage in 7 years of plenty in preparation for 7 years of want that was about to come upon Egypt. In Genesis 41:55 we read these words, "When all Egypt began to feel the famine, the people cried to Pharaoh for food. Then Pharaoh told all the Egyptians, "Go to Joseph and do what he tells you."

Now Joseph is an Old Testament type and forerunner of Jesus Christ. Joseph was God's agent of salvation in those days. And, the formula for salvation, the key to receiving life in the midst of death was this: "Go to Joseph and do (notice the word "do") "do" what he tells you."

In our New Testament lesson from John 2, Jesus is attending a wedding at Cana in Galilee. The host is about to be humiliated and disgraced in the community because he has run out of wine for the wedding guests. According to John 2:5, Jesus' mother, Mary, looked to the household servants and said to them--notice the wording: "Do whatever he tells you." And, we remember the rest of the story: water in water jugs normally used for ceremonial washing, was turned into wine. And rather than being

humiliated, the head of that home was commended for

saving the best wine for last. What I want us to see from both these examples is that blessing and salvation and even miracles follow acts of obedience. The Lord is our shepherd and when we follow where He leads us, and do in faith what He tells us, we are going to be blessed often in miraculous ways and others are going to be blessed through our lives.

Now this has everything to do with what we are doing here this morning. Jesus said of what we call the Lord's Supper, "This do in remembrance of me." And, there is nothing magical about this bread that we eat here this morning. There's nothing magical about this grape juice. There are some good antioxidants in the juice, but nothing magical. Eating this bread and drinking of this cup does not make us holy. But, when we do this as a simple act of obedience--because He told us to do it--and when we do this as a pledge that we aim to live our whole lives in simple obedience to King Jesus, then we can expect to be blessed and to be empowered. When we live our whole lives on this basis, then we can expect that God will provide all the bread we need to live on. Then we can expect miracles. Then we can expect great healings. Then we can expect life to show up in the midst of death.

As you eat the bread and drink from the cup of Communion this morning just do it as an act of faith and loving obedience to King Jesus. Allow it also to be a symbol that you will do as He asks in every other area of your life. If He asks you to pick it up, pick it up. If He asks you to lay it down, lay it down. If He asks you to confess, confess. If He asks you to forgive, forgive. If He asks you to lay down your possession, lay it down. If He asks you to speak, speak. And when He asks you to be silent, be silent. Each of us needs to say as Jesus said, "**not my will, rather God's will be done in my life.**"

You see, this table is the reminder of Jesus' complete sacrifice of Himself for us. And, it is also the reminder that

we love and worship the Lord by offering our lives as complete and living sacrifices to Him.

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Exodus 41:53-57; John 2:1-11

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