

PP “A person will worship something, have no doubt about that. We may think our tribute is paid in secret in the dark recesses of our hearts, but it will out. That which dominates our imaginations and our thoughts will determine our lives, and our character. Therefore, it behooves us to be careful what we worship, for what we are worshipping we are becoming.” Emerson

“... it behooves us to be careful what we worship, for what we are worshipping we are becoming.” **PP** This morning we are celebrating. We are celebrating new people joining this congregation and the baptism of children. As we celebrate a question arises: “what will we teach these children to worship knowing that what they worship they will become?”

PP Here’s what I am thinking: on this morning baptism what we hope He for these children and for all of our children is that they will be better and greater than we are. If we put a dent in the world for God’s kingdom, we want our kids to put a crater in the world for the kingdom of God. If people see us coming and say, “Here are those people who turn the world upside down”, we want people to say of our kids, “Look out, here come those people who turn the world upside down.” We want want the greatness of our kids to outstrip our own. There is a hymn where one of the verses says this, **God of the prophets bless the prophets heirs! Elijah’s mantle o’er Elisha cast: each age for your own solemn task prepares; make each one stronger, nobler than the last.** But if this next generation is going to be stronger, nobler than the last what will it take? How can we empower a generation to turn the world upside down, to put crater in the world for the kingdom of God, who can, in the words of our present series, cause some significant global warming in the world that is too often cold and broken?

God is in the house...³⁴ *But when the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together.*³⁵ *And one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him.*³⁶ *“Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?”*³⁷ *And he said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.*³⁸ *This is the great and first commandment.*³⁹ *And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself.*⁴⁰ *On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.”* How can we empower a generation? By creating a generation that loves the Lord their God with all their heart and with all their soul and with all their mind.

PP Love the Lord their God. An important thing for us to understand about the word love: we attach love to a feeling the Bible most often takes a different perspective, love is attached to action and to loyalty. Go back to the first time we hear the words about loving God, back to the book of Deuteronomy chapter 6. Here’s the deal. It is written like a treaty between a king and his subjects. In this kind of treaty the call to love the king means to have an emotional attachment to the king, but that is not the central meaning. The central meaning of this word love is to be loyal to another. It means to be loyal to the king. In Deuteronomy chapter 6 and again in Matthew 22 we quickly become aware that the loyalty that we are to give to God is a complete loyalty or we might say God calls us to be fiercely loyal to him. We understand this when we read the words that we are to love the Lord our God with all our heart and with all our soul and with all our might. The word “all” is a word that speaks of being undivided or putting it a

little bit more into our language it means to be “all in”, “holding nothing back”. This kind of loyalty leads to greatness for the kingdom, leads to the next generation being greater than this one.

PPBritish author C.S. Lewis pointed out, **“Christianity, if false is of no importance, and if true, is of infinite importance. The only thing Christianity cannot be is moderately important.”** The words of Lewis connect with the words of Jesus in that if Christianity is true we need to be “all in”; we need to be fiercely loyal to God. The problem for our kids is that they live in a world where somehow Christianity is portrayed as moderately important. In recent studies middle school students and high school students revealed that they approach their Christian faith and participating in it basically like music and sports, and extracurricular activity: a good, well-rounded thing to do, but unnecessary for a whole and deep life. Religion, these young people concurred, is a very nice thing. It’s a message that is backed up by the adults in their lives who make sure that there’s coaching and opportunities for kids to develop and improve their ability in sports, their SAT scores, and a host of other things but are reticent to invest in things that will make them fiercely loyal to God; seemingly believing that while all of these other things take time, effort, and investment of resources that faith will just happen by osmosis—that fierce loyalty to God is a natural happening.

PPIt is not. If the prayer of the song, **God of the prophets bless the prophets heirs! Elijah’s mantle o’er Elisha cast: each age for your own solemn task prepares; make each one stronger, nobler than the last,** if the prayer of this song is going to become reality we need to understand that fierce loyalty to God takes time, effort, and investment of resources. We need to understand that there are people and forces that would seek to keep us and our children from this life of fierce loyalty to God and the investment it takes to make this loyalty reality. Let’s think about it with just one of the things that Jesus says we are to give wholly to God. Jesus says, “You shall love the Lord your God... with your whole soul...” With your whole soul is another way of saying, “with every breath you take during your entire life be fiercely loyal to God.” We get a sense of the level of this loyalty in Mark 8. Here the word “soul” is translated life. Here’s what Jesus has to **PP**say, ³⁴ *And calling the crowd to him with his disciples, he said to them, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.”* ³⁵ *For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel’s will save it.* ³⁶ *For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his life?* ³⁷ *For what can a man give in return for his life?* ³⁸ *For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him will the Son of Man also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.”* **PP** Fierce loyalty: let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. One senses that a person who takes up his cross and follows Christ sees Christianity as of infinite importance. But this kind of commitment faces opposition. The opposition faces is most often not loud, in-your-face, abusive opposition. Rather, it is quiet opposition, it is opposition that is part of the structure of the culture we live in. Our culture is designed to oppose a fierce loyalty to God. Indeed, our culture is designed to choke out fierce loyalty. Jesus tells a parable about a sower who goes to plant his seed. Some of the seed falls

on the path, some on rocky ground, some among thorns and someone good soil. Later on his disciples asking what this parable means. This is a bit of what he says in Matthew 13, *22The one who received the seed that fell among the thorns is the man who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke it, making it unfruitful. 23But the one who received the seed that fell on good soil is the man who hears the word and understands it. He produces a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown.*" Matthew 13 **PP**The deceitfulness of wealth chokes out being fruitful, the deceitfulness, dishonesty of wealth works to keep us speak from being fiercely loyal to God by promising a good life, the best life if we just get enough. That message is getting through loud and clear. 80% of 18–25-year-olds believe that getting rich is the top goal in life. One can say that there is a fierce loyalty to wealth and that loyalty pushes out a fierce loyalty to God. As Jesus says in Matthew 6.²⁴ *"No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money.*

PPOur culture is designed to oppose a fierce loyalty to God. It will take the same kind of effort, the same kind of coaching, and investment that we give to sports, SATs, and other things if we are going to create a generation that loves God with the whole soul. In fact, it'll take even greater effort for when we coach our children in sports and these other things we are going in the flow of culture not against, but when we seek to grow children who are fiercely loyal to God we are pushing against the flow of culture. Think about it in what we just talked about. **PP**Wealth deceives us, chokes our lives and makes us unfruitful. However, pursuing wealth is simply going with the flow of our culture. Think of being a family and a community of faith that challenges the notion that getting rich is a top priority. Think of being a family that is so fiercely loyal to God that we are determined to use all of our resources in ways that please God, bring praise to him, and further his kingdom. Think about being a family and the community of faith that seeks to break the hold of riches or the desire for riches in our lives. **PP**Think of being a family and the community of faith that knows one of the best ways to break the hold of riches on our lives is to do the outrageous thing of being a people of generosity. Go to Leviticus 23 *9 The LORD said to Moses, 10 "Speak to the Israelites and say to them: 'When you enter the land I am going to give you and you reap its harvest, bring to the priest a sheaf of the first grain you harvest. 11 He is to wave the sheaf before the LORD so it will be accepted on your behalf; the priest is to wave it on the day after the Sabbath. 14 You must not eat any bread, or roasted or new grain, until the very day you bring this offering to your God. This is to be a lasting ordinance for the generations to come, wherever you live.* Here's God's deal. He says that before the people use any of their crops for themselves, that they have to give the first part to him. Anything less is ripping him off. Imagine what message it sends when a family makes it clear, crystal clear that God always gets the first part of any resource that flows into that family, teaching their children that fail to give God the first part of the resource is to rob God. Imagine how this can break the idea that the goal of life is to get rich. Kids know from the beginning that giving to God trumps riches, it even trumps getting what you want first before you give to God.

PPOur culture is designed to oppose people who with every breath they take during

their entire lives are fiercely loyal to God. Living with fierce loyalty to God faces another challenge, namely, it speaks of a long term commitment with rewards that are often in the future. That's a huge problem. Because our culture tells the story that rewards should be immediate. We should not have to invest for the long term. Certainly we should not have to wait for death for the rewards to come. And yet, we know that God's work is a long term project that will call for sacrifice, that may not see reward until we close our eyes for the last time and open them and see God. That lacks appeal in a culture that is all about the short-term, that wants instant reward. To establish a beachhead in our families means teaching our kids God's truth—that faithfulness to him, following his path of trumps immediate gratification and finally that this life far surpasses any other way of life, that surpass riches that stay behind when we lie in the grave or for that matter riches that we pursue only to find out that they leave us hollow and empty when we get all we want only to discover as one person who did the riches thing said, **Yes, I have a nice apartment, a great job, a great degree, great clothing. But I feel empty inside rather often.**

PP Being fiercely loyal to God means walking against the tide, it also means bringing global warming to a world that is cold and hurting. It is a people of generosity who bring hope and at times literally warmth to the poor. It is a people of generosity who bring beauty and smiles to the world by giving so that surgeons can fix cleft palates. It is people who are willing to work for the long-term and wait for God's blessing of "well done good and faithful servant" who are able to work for justice, a justice that may be a long way off; were willing to bring the transforming power of the gospel to a people who may not own it for years to come; who are willing to risk their lives for the good of others because they know they have an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade—which is kept in heaven for them.

PP It takes every bit as much coaching, teaching, and living by example for our children to be fiercely loyal to God as it does for them to be successful in sports or on their SATs. In fact, it takes more for a life that is fiercely loyal to God moves against the tide of our culture. It takes every bit as much effort as we work to help our kids see that living a life of faith is not an extracurricular activity like music and sports: the good, well-rounded thing to do, but unnecessary for true life, rather that faith, Christianity is either infinitely important or completely unimportant, but it cannot be moderately important in their lives or in ours.

PP A few moments ago we made promises. The parents made promises to the children and we as a community made promises to these children which basically said, "we will make the faith real, vital, something that you desire for yourself when you see it in us." The question for us is, "are those just words or will we invest every bit as much in coaching, teaching, and living by example so that we provide every path possible for these children and all of our children to be fiercely loyal to God?" The question for us is, "Will we design our lives to push against the tide of our culture so that we are fiercely loyal to God? Will our lives declare their Christian faith is infinitely important or will our children see adults for whom the face is oddly moderately important? Will we demand something of our children that we've been unwilling to give ourselves to?"

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PP Prayer: God of the prophets bless the prophet’s heirs! Elijah’s mantle o’er Elisha cast: each age for your own solemn task prepares; make each one stronger, nobler than the last. Amen.