

Sermon by Dr. Jeremiah
“What Will You Do with Your Life?”
Philippians 2:12-13

On this Sanctity of Life Sunday, I'm reminded of the fact that human life is sacred not because we say it is. Many rightly argue that humans don't consider life valuable, much less sacred. Sanctity of Life Sunday is not our affirmation of life, but our affirmation of God's declaration about life. Our statements about human life can be very changeable. But God's declaration about it is unchangeable. His timeless unambiguous statement is that human life is precious. In Genesis 1:27 God said, “Let us make man in our image, according to our likeness.” “Created in the image of God” is a statement of incomparable dignity and value. Men and women, boys and girls have been given a unique make-up that isn't like the animals, but is like the very nature of God Himself. In Psalm 8 God declares that human beings are the crowning glory of His creation and the rulers of that creation. Human life is precious, and we do well to affirm it, promote it, protect it all we can in our community, country, and world. From God's Word we know that we were created not just for this life, but for eternity. Being saved by Jesus Christ secures for us eternal life; awaiting us in the future is a forever destiny of victory, peace, joy, and glory. But this eternal life is not just a hope out there in the future; it's a distinctive life to be lived now.

Verse 12 tells us to work out our salvation with fear and trembling. That is, take this gift, take this eternal life and use it, apply it to our lives today and all the days before us. A thought that has kept coming up these past weeks as I've studied this passage is: What happens if you don't do it? That is, you're a believer in Jesus Christ, you've received this great salvation in your life, but you're not committed to using it, applying it, working it out in your life. But verse 13 says, “It is God who works in you to will and to act according to His good purpose.” He's committed to doing His work even if you aren't. Now how does God work in that situation? Hebrews 12:6 says, “The Lord disciplines those He loves, and He punishes everyone He accepts as a son.” Realize that if God has called you and given you His gift of salvation, He's committed to completing that work in your life. If we don't commit to our part of the work, if we don't follow and obey Him, then God in His love for us is going to discipline us; it might be suffering, difficulty, disappointment, or sorrow. If you're not living your life as God's called you to in Jesus Christ, don't be surprised if certain unpleasant things begin to happen to you. I'm not saying that every Christian who suffers is being disciplined, but God says He does do that. If we fail to respond to His call to work out our salvation, then we shouldn't be surprised if we experience His discipline. Given we're committed, the question before us is how? How will we invest our lives so that we do this great work God has for us? One way to get at that question is to realize that we live each day responding to pressures, or we live each day responding to priorities. That is, you either let circumstances determine what's important, or you decide what's important. I don't think any of us want our lives ruled by our circumstances, by forces beyond our control. That leaves us living by priorities. There are five critical priority relationships you and I need to address if we're going to work out our salvation as God calls us to. I say that believing that who you are and where you are a year from now will be largely determined by your relationships.

First, there's your relationship with Jesus Christ. Receiving Him as Savior, confessing Him to be your Lord is to say that you have received this precious gift of salvation and you know that He has a plan; working out your salvation with faith, confidence, and joy is what you've signed up for as He is Lord of your life. To say He's Lord is to commit to live all of life, engage in all your other relationships affirming He's number one. As I Corinthians 10:31 says, “Do it all for the glory of God.” One of the results of putting Him first is that He will ensure your other priorities will fall into place in a positive, helpful, and healthy way. Note what Jesus said in Matthew 6:33: “Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness” (that is, put Him #1) “and all these things will be given to you as well.” Putting any other priority in first place will only bring frustration, disorder, and disappointment in your life. Growing in this key relationship means getting to know and love and trust Jesus more and more as times goes on. Two valuable tools God's given us to do that are spending time alone with Him in prayer and spending time in God's Word. Tommy has made available a “Read Through the Bible in a Year” plan, a great help to encourage you to get into the Word on a daily basis. It's available at the Welcome Center for you to pick up and use. Jesus Christ is the number one relationship, followed by four others. Please notice the significant role Jesus plays in each of these.

The second priority relationship is marriage and family. Hebrews 13:34 tells us that “marriage should be honored by all.” Why? Because marriage was created by God for our benefit and blessing. The marriage relationship that honors the giver of your salvation is described with these words in Ephesians chapter five: “Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved His church and gave Himself up for her” (v. 25). It’s not, “I love my wife,” but “I love my wife the way Jesus loves His church, selflessly, sacrificially; He gave His life for her.” “Wives, submit to your husbands, as to the Lord” (v. 22). Listen to what Ephesians 6:1-4 says about the relationship between parents and children: “Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. ‘Honor your father and your mother’ which is the first commandment with a promise, ‘that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth.’” Then this word to dads: “Fathers, do not exasperate” (that is, do not frustrate, anger) “your children, instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.” Marriage and family is a critical relationship in working out your salvation.

The third priority is your church. Romans 12:5 says, “In Christ, we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. The church is important because we belong to each other; we need each other. We need to be in relationship with other believers, where we can be encouraged and encourage others, where we can give and be given to, where we can love and be loved, where we can serve and be served, where we can help and be helped. The church is also vital in God’s plan for our lives because He’s doing something in His church that He’s doing nowhere else in the world: He’s creating a people for Himself, a “chosen people, a royal priesthood, a people belonging to Him, declaring the praises of Him who called us out of the darkness and into His wonderful light and life” (I Peter 2:9). He’s called each of us to be a part of that great work!

The fourth priority relationship is your work. Those of you in school now, please understand that your work at this point in your life is your schooling. Colossians 3:23 says, “Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men.” There’s a challenge and a warning in this verse. The challenge is to excel, to do the very best you can in your work. But the words “working for the Lord” is a warning: as you do the very best you can, remember who’s number one in your life. Over the years I’ve seen too many men (and sometimes women, too) make work their number one priority in life. That’s one of the best ways to destroy the other priority relationships in your life, especially marriage. If a person makes work number one, they may be wildly successful in the work world, yet over and over we see failure in every other part of that individual’s life. You make work number one and you are headed for trouble.

A fifth priority relationship is people in your mission field: those 6-10 individuals you’re in regular, ongoing contact with who do not know Jesus as their Savior and Lord. Do you realize you’re God’s representative to those people? You’re the person God’s chosen to share Jesus Christ with those who do not yet know Him as Savior and Lord. In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus said, “you are the light of the world” (Matthew 5:14). To hide the light, shield it from the darkness of unbeliever’s lives is to disobey and dishonor Jesus.

Jesus Christ, family, church, work, mission field: here are five priority relationships that are critical to your life, to working out your salvation. The application is a simple one. Listed on your outline are God’s top priorities for your life. Next to this list is a place for you to think about and write down your priorities. Jesus Christ, marriage and family, church, work, mission field. I have to say I deliberately left out one relationship here in this list, in this message today. That’s your relationship with yourself. It strikes me that we’re all smart enough to realize what happens when we put our self in first place. It destroys all the other relationships. Paul wrote, “I am crucified with Christ.” That’s the priority of self if you are going to work out your salvation. Let me invite you to look at the list and think about it. Maybe even take out a pen and write down what you would like to see happen in the months ahead in the year 2006. Will Jesus be number one? Will you make that a priority? And will you pursue it decisively, courageously, faithfully?