

God Is First, Part 2
A Message for Trinity Evangelical Free Church
Sunday, September 22, 2019

Introduction



Imagine that you're riding on a modern airliner. I hope that, if you're given the opportunity to fly, every flight is pleasant and safe. The airline company "United" used to have the slogan, "Fly the friendly skies..."

-I hope that, if you ever fly, that you will fly friendly skies.

However, imagine that something goes wrong. The plane you're riding in has experienced some sort of trouble. The area of the plane you're riding in, the cabin, loses pressure. Fortunately for everyone, the people who design modern airliners include something for times like this: oxygen masks. They're included in the ceiling over everyone's heads.



So, the pilot activates the oxygen system, and all the masks fall out, ready to supply life-giving air. All is good.

You're about to grab it and put it on, when you realize that there's a person next to you with a problem. Maybe it's a person who has passed out. Maybe it's a small child. ***Maybe it's your child?***

What should you do?

Perhaps you should put the welfare of others before yourself, and help the person next to you? Then, and only then, would you put the mask on yourself. ***You want to be a good person, right?***

Well, it turns out that, not only have the designers thought about this, but the airline companies have given it some thought as well. If you've ever ridden on a modern airliner, you know that you're supposed to put the mask on yourself first, and then help the people around you. That way, you stay awake and alert so that you can help others, rather than risk passing out yourself and possibly get in the way of help for others. This message is repeated at the beginning of every commercial airline flight

Every flight.

There's a story about an airliner pilot that got a little bored giving the same message over and over again. So, one day, he gave the instructions this way: "In the unlikely event that the cabin loses air-pressure, oxygen masks will come down from the ceiling. If you are traveling with a child, put the mask on yourself first, then your child. If you are traveling with more than one child, decide in advance which one you love the most..."

I'm not sure how long he lasted with that airline company.

Life presents a surprising amount of times when you must make a choice between two options. In some cases, you're going to do both, but which one goes first? In other cases, you can only do one. In either case, which action is more important? How do we decide?

Previously, we began our series, "Life Answers In Genesis" by talking about things that we learn from the first sentence of the Bible. The first thing we learned is that ***God is first***. We talked about what this means to the world. Today, we'll talk about what it means to us as individuals, and to us as a church.

Our discussion will have three parts:

- I. Review from "God Is First - Part One".
- II. We know that God is first – what does that mean for us and our church?
- III. Why is putting God first sometimes hard?

I. Review from Part One.

We talked about “five sentences to get you through life”.

- God is First.
- God is in control.
- God knows what he’s doing.
- God is good.
- God cherishes me.

They’re not a perfect summary of the Bible, or of the Christian life. However, they’ve gotten me through a lot of challenges.

Then, we talked about what we can learn from reading just the first sentence of the Bible.

- God is First: He just is. There was nothing else before.
- God is: His existence is assumed, never argued.
- God is Creator: And, He created with a plan.
- God is Glorious: Because God is first, our main purpose is to glorify him.

We proceeded on to talk about what that meant for the world. It answers important life questions:

- Where do we come from? God Made us.
- Do our lives have meaning and purpose? Yes!
- Are we special in the universe? Yes!
- What does the future hold? God is in control.
- How should we run our world? By taking these things into account.

Finally, we also mentioned something important: Some don’t believe in God. This creates problems, because people who don’t believe in God largely run the world.

So, we know what these things mean for the world.

Now, let’s talk about what these things mean for us.

II. What does this mean for us and our church?

A. Because God is first, God's values displace our values.

Some of our readers like math and science. Others like more practical things. Let's cater to the math and science folks for just a moment.

We can discuss our relationship with God using two simple mathematical formulas.

Formula #1

God > us
(God is greater than us)

Formula #2

If God > us, then God's values are greater than our values.

From the first time we meet God, we start to learn his values. What are values? Values are the things that are valuable to someone. In other words, what's important? What's good? What's bad? What's desirable? What's not?

Because God is first, God's values displace our values.

- If something is valuable to God, it should become valuable to us.
- If something makes God happy, at some point, it should make us happy.
- If something makes God unhappy (or, even angry), at some point, it should make us unhappy (or, even angry).

OK, so how do we find out what God's values are? We learn about God's values by studying his Word, the Bible. That's something else we learn from the first sentence of the Bible. God uses words to communicate with us. So, we want to learn the words. That's our message for next time.

For now, we're asking the question, "What does this mean for us and our church?" Let's move on to our next point in this section:

B. When God's values displace ours, it affects our actions.

It changes our actions in two ways.

First, it changes how we treat God and others.

“He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God (Micah 6:8).”

God is a God of justice. God loves it when we treat others around us fairly and justly.

God is a God of mercy. He loves it when we treat others with mercy. As a practical matter, that means, he forgives, helps us in our need. So, we forgive others, and we try to help others in their need.

I while back, I gave a message for Labor Day weekend about the work of God. In that message, we learned an amazing fact about God: ***God is humble***. Humility means that someone turns out from themselves and values others. One way humility is expressed is in service to others.

When God created our world and our universe, he became a servant of the things he created. The sun must rise and set on Schedule. Somebody has to make that happen. God did just that; He committed himself to make it happen. God commits himself to make the universe run for our benefit, because he is humble. So, he loves it when we walk in humility.

Humility tells us that God is first. Humility then tells us something amazing. After we put God first, we begin to value others. We begin to serve others.

Here’s an old saying: There is a path to JOY:

Jesus, Others, and then, You.

If you can keep things in that order, you have joy. If you reverse the order, you don’t have joy. And you have a totally meaningless word: YOJ. Perhaps a new kind of soft drink?

Anyway, there are some traditional ways of putting God first. Let’s talk about those.

The second way that things change is: It changes how we use our resources.

-We understand that our resources come from God and are part of God’s plan.

"Honor the Lord with your wealth and with the firstfruits
of all your produce... (Proverbs 3:9-10)"

We believe that God made us to be like him. He has filled our world with all kinds of practical ways to do that. We learned back on Labor Day that God works. It was a lot of work creating the universe. It’s a lot of ongoing work to take care of it. So, when God created Adam and Eve,

he put them in the Garden. We're told he put them there "...to work it and to take care of it" (Genesis 2:15).

Another quality of God is his generosity. God gives generously to us. He allows us to keep **what we need** to live and to be happy. Then, he commands that we give the first, the best, of our resources back to him - What he calls the "first fruits". So, he allows us to be like him by following his example of generosity.

In churches, we sometimes talk about the three "Ts" of giving:

Time, Talents, and Treasure.

There are questions about the way people gave in old testament days verses how we give today. In ancient days, the people were commanded to Tithe: to give 10%. Some say that's still the standard. Others say we have a higher standard today: Generosity – We're told to give generously.

We'll have to cover the whole topic of giving another day, but for now, God wants our best.

- The best of our Time.
- The best of our Talents.
- The best of our Treasures.

So, God is First. We've learned some important things about what this means to us and our church. Because God is first, God's values displace our values.

- God is greater than us, so God's values are greater than ours.
- We learn God's values by studying his word, the Bible.

When God's values displace our values, it affects our actions.

- It changes how we treat God and others.
 - We love justice and mercy.
 - We walk humbly with our God.
- It changes how we use our resources.
 - We give of our time, our talents, and our treasures.
 - And, we give generously.

So, now we move on to our next major point.

III. Why is this sometimes hard?

Because it is.

It's always easier to keep than to give. It's always easier to hoard than to be generous. Putting God first is often hard. The question isn't, "How do we make putting God first easy?" The question is, "How do we find satisfaction in putting God First? - How do we find satisfaction in doing something that's often hard?" So, let's look at this question from that perspective.

How do we do that?

A. We need to understand Grace.

Most people think that they must do good works to earn God's favor. The problem is, when have we done enough works? We become the proverbial mouse on the wheel. We just keep running and running and running.



It gets tiring.

Other people don't understand the size of God's love and forgiveness. They think that God is just waiting to hit them with lightning bolts. Again, that gets tiring. It's tiring to live your life in fear. Grace teaches us that, when someone accepts Jesus Christ as their Savior, their motivation changes. If God gives them a direct command, and they disobey, God doesn't send punishment. He says, "I love you, and I forgive you."

If you don't understand that, your life is like a rat's wheel.

Another quick note: Sometimes people find themselves in rough situations. It's hard to give generously if your spouse isn't on board with your faith. We get that. ***Grace says, "do the best you can."***

Here's another reason we miss out on satisfaction:

B. We don't understand the idols.

There are lots of voices surrounding us, telling us that other things should be first - I've been calling them the idols; the other voices. There are lots of them.

Recall something we said in the last lesson: There are many in the world who don't believe in God. Well, add to those that there are many in the world who don't want to put God first. The other voices can be very compelling. You only have to turn on a TV to get thousands of suggestions for ways to spend your time, your talents, and your treasures. Rarely to they involve God.

Putting God first has a cost. Putting money into God's treasury means the money isn't in our pockets. It requires us to be much more careful about budgeting. In order to say "yes" to God, we have to say "no" to the other voices. It can be hard. However, you recall the verse from Joshua:

"Choose this day whom you will serve. (Joshua 24:15)"

At some point, you must make a choice. Here's another challenge:

C. We need to understand the symbols God has given us.

For example, consider the Sabbath:

"Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. (Exodus 20:8)"

Once again, there is discussion about whether we honor the Sabbath the same way in the New Testament Age that people were commanded to honor it in the Old Testament age. Here's my personal opinion: We're told in the first chapter of the Bible that God took one day out of seven. Today, we reserve at least one day to worship.

Friends, this is important.

Here's where an understanding of idols comes in. I once had a friend who faithfully brought his family to church every Sunday - with one exception. His daughter in high school showed some talent in Softball. He got the idea that someday, she would get a college scholarship. So, when a game took place on Sunday, she went to softball. His wife wasn't on board with his faith, so there was only one driver. That meant that his other children went along, too. This happened in growing amounts as his daughter was required to go to more and more games.

Then, the time came for the scholarship.

Unfortunately, no one told this man's daughter that, to get a college scholarship, you need more than athletic talent - You also must maintain your grades. Her grades weren't very good, so, no scholarship. Upon graduating from high school, she moved in with a drug addict who was 15 years older than her. The other kids all fell away from the faith. The wife was never won over.

There's a warning here for all of us. Many who call themselves "Christian" hold the following value:

***God is first.
(Until something else is.)***

If you hold that value, there is a group of people who will see it right away - Your family.

Friends, you need to be in church. Your family needs to be in church.

It's important to turn away from the idols that tell us to put other things before God. It's important to do it for yourself. If for no other reason, do it because of the example it shows to our families, our neighbors, and anyone else who looks at us. The Sabbath is an important symbol that we must learn to understand.

One more quick point before we close: Another symbol that God has given us is our church building. When the people of Israel returned from their deportation from Babylon, they were a little slow to fix up the temple. They fixed up their own homes first.

We're told in the Book of Haggai:

Then the word of the Lord came through the prophet Haggai: "Is it a time for you yourselves to be living in your paneled houses, while this house remains a ruin? (Haggai 1:3-4)"

The way we think of our local house of worship reflects the way we think about God. If the building is in disrepair, if the furnishings look broken down, and we don't see it or care, it says something. The prophet Haggai looked at his friends and asked a simple question:

Is your house nicer than God's house?

You see, if God is greater than us, then God's house is greater than our house. And once again, there is a group of people who see - Newcomers, people in the community. As we try to reach out to our community, it matters what our building looks like. That's why we spend money on our building. It's appropriate and good to do so.

Conclusion

So, we know that God is first. What does that mean to us and our church?

It means that God's values displace our values.

God is greater than us, so God's values come first.

When God's values displace our values, it affects our behavior.

We treat other differently.
We view our resources differently.
We give – we give generously.

So, why is putting God first sometimes hard?

-Because it is.

So, better stated, how do we find satisfaction in this? Well, there are lots of reasons that we couldn't hit today, but for starters,

A. We need to fully understand grace.

We get worn out by the rat's wheel of trying to earn God's favor with works.
We get tired out by living in fear of God's punishment.

Friends, God cherishes you.

Through Jesus Christ:

- He accepts you. You don't have to earn his love with works.
- He forgives you. You need never fear punishment.

B We need to understand the idols.

There are voices all over the place telling us to put them first, not God.
But, at some point, we must choose who and what will be first.

C. Finally, we need to understand the symbols that God has given us.

The Sabbath: We need to put worship and church first over other activities.
The church building: It needs to be maintained and honored.

We're left today with one simple message: God is first, so let's ask God's help to put him first in everything.