

"Me and My House"

(Family Matters, part 4)

Joshua 24:14-15, Acts 16:22-34

Welcome, friends. It feels good to be outside, doesn't it? We get to celebrate and worship in God's beautiful creation, and I hope this day is a special one for you.

Turn to your neighbor and say, "Jesus is everything you need right now." Jesus is our hope and our life, the one who meets us in this place, and we recognize that without him, we cannot do anything. What a privilege it is to worship Christ with you today.

Would you please pray with me? Almighty God, we are overwhelmed by your presence. Through your Spirit, please speak your words of challenge and encouragement to us, so that our families may grow strong and know you. May the words of our mouths and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight. We pray this in the name of Jesus Christ, our Redeemer. Amen.

The last few weeks we have been talking about families. As a church, we have decided we want to do everything possible to encourage, support and grow the families God places in our midst. We have talked about encouraging our families, praying for our families, asking for healing for our families, and being honest with our doubts. Today I want to talk about the decisions parents make on behalf of their children regarding faith.

Did you have a "drug problem" when you were a child? You know, your parents "drug" you to school, they "drug" you to piano lessons, and they "drug" you to church? Maybe that was you. Maybe you didn't go willingly. Maybe your parents made some decisions for you regarding faith and religion.

Were any of you baptized as infants? You didn't make that decision yourself, either. I was baptized on January 25th, 1976, at one month old. I don't remember it! My parents took me there; they made that decision for me.

Should parents make decisions of faith on behalf of their children? This is the main question to consider as we look into God's Word today.

Let's start in Joshua 24:14-15. This is a snippet from Joshua's farewell speech to the Israelites. Let me set the scene for you. They had all gathered together after conquering the Promised Land, when they had finally entered into

a time of peace. Joshua warned them not to forget who had brought them into the Promised Land: God. We read two verses today, where Joshua says, “If following God seems too hard for you, then make a choice. Either serve the foreign gods, or serve God Almighty.” (my paraphrase) And then he proclaims: “But as for me and my household (my house, my family), we will serve the Lord.”

Joshua set a standard for us. As the head of his household, he chose the direction they would go, worshipping the one true God, setting the expectation for them. Joshua made that decision for his own family.

The truth is, we can all make “corporate” decisions to worship God and follow Jesus Christ, for ourselves and for our own families. While Joshua set the precedent, the main scripture I want to examine today is in the New Testament, in Acts 16. This is the story of Paul, Silas, and the jailer. As we will see, the jailer made a similar decision on behalf of his whole family.

Let’s talk about the jailer’s job first. He was paid by the Roman government to live at the jail and keep the peace. He kept the bad people locked up. His house would have been right next door, with his whole family. Maybe his children played jokes on him, hiding the keys. (That’s what I would have done.) His whole family would have seen every prisoner enter the jail: the murderers, rebels, thieves and political prisoners, men and women. These were not the good examples one normally chose for their children.

And one day, the apostles Paul and Silas end up in this jail. The day started out normally. They were sharing the good news, preaching the Word of God. They wanted people to know Jesus Christ and serve him. Great idea! But as so often happens when we follow God, they encountered resistance.

Paul and Silas healed a fortune-telling slave girl of an evil spirit, and as a result of their good deed, they were attacked by a mob, beaten, and thrown in jail: not just a normal jail, but the inner prison, where the worst of criminals were kept. On a scale of 1 to 10, this had to be a “0” day for them. There they were, innocent, yet chained in a dark, smelly cell, bruised and bleeding. I’ve had some bad days, but nothing like that.

So, on their worst day, what does the scripture say Paul and Silas did in this horrible place? They prayed and sang hymns to God, at midnight, after a whole

day of being falsely arrested and beaten. They were singing praises to God.

Wow. How often do we do that when we have a bad day?

Remember, the jailer's home was attached to the jail. He saw and heard all of this. He knew these two men were followers of Jesus Christ by their words and their actions. The echoes of their songs reached from the prison cell to the jailer's bedroom.

At midnight, in the midst of this crazy serenade, God sent a violent earthquake, shaking the whole building, collapsing walls, breaking windows, and unlocking everyone's chains. Of course, it woke the jailer, who rushed over to survey the damage. The first thing he saw was that all the doors were open, and assuming that everyone had escaped, he prepared to kill himself. If the Romans found out all his prisoners had fled, the jailer and his family would have been punished by execution. Failing at his job had nasty consequences! But Paul, hearing the sword being drawn, cried out, "Don't harm yourself. We are all still here!"

Whoa. As if praying and singing hymns, at midnight, in the center of the worst part of the prison while bruised and chained wasn't testimony enough that they believed in Jesus Christ, Paul and Silas did not even escape when they had the chance. Why? They knew that the jailer would have been killed, and they wanted to spare his life. They even interceded before the jailer committed suicide.

This story overwhelms me, and I wasn't even there. And the jailer? He was stunned. He called for light, ran inside, saw Paul and Silas sitting there, fell to his knees and asked them, "How can I be saved?" Paul and Silas were more than eager to tell him the good news: Jesus Christ, the Son of God, lived among us, and willingly died on the cross to reconcile us back to God, to redeem us. Jesus offers the chance to every man, woman, and child who trust in him alone to be saved from their sins and have eternal life.

The jailer heard all this news and believed. He brought Paul and Silas out, washed their wounds, brought them into his home and immediately asked to be baptized.

Now here is the fascinating point. The jailer didn't just choose for himself to be baptized. The bible says "immediately he and all his household were

baptized.” (Acts 16:33). This included his wife, his children, and any servants, maybe even his cousins, aunts and uncles, and any in-laws visiting him. Whoever was under his roof at the moment, they were all baptized.

What does this say to us? Some parents say, “My children will make their own decision to follow Jesus somehow, some day.” Yes and no. True, God gives each person a chance to make an individual decision to follow Jesus. Yet this story tells us, as parents, we have a major role in influencing that decision. It is not simply up to our children to figure it out on their own. We can choose, too.

I remember asking a pastor once, “Where in the bible does it say that children could be baptized?” He pointed me to this scripture. The logical assumption is the jailer’s house included children. He was so overwhelmed by what Paul and Silas had done that he chose to have his whole household baptized immediately. Then they had a meal to celebrate. At midnight!

We can make decisions on behalf of our whole families. We do all the time regarding school, vacation, finances and homes. We must also help our children choose to serve God. And this is not limited to just the fathers. Earlier in this same chapter (Acts 16:15), a woman named Lydia also had her family baptized.

Joshua, Lydia, the jailer, and other parents in the Bible, more often than not, make corporate decisions to follow God, involving their whole family in the faith. Does it always happen that way today? No, but I think it should. Parents who choose to serve God will feel that ripple effect throughout their whole families.

How can we apply this lesson in practical ways? For starters, we can choose to bring our children to worship God. We can attend and support a local church....Grace UMC for example! We can involve them in what God is doing in the world by participating in service projects together. We can sit at the dinner table and engage them in faith discussions. We can pray real, deep prayers. We can thank God together.

Let me be clear. Forcing a child to come to church on Sunday does not make him or her a Christian. If you walk into a McDonald’s, you don’t become double-cheeseburger. But bringing children to church exposes them to the life-giving message we proclaim. Our deepest desire for our children is that they

would follow Jesus Christ. Here is where they can participate in that faith. So let's start by committing to bring our children with us to worship.

I want to encourage you this week to be an example of faithfulness to a child today, even if that child is not yours. Think about the way you worship, and what that shows children about who God is. Do you children know what you give to the offering? Have you asked them to help? My kids used to fight over who put the envelope in the offering plate! Something as simple as giving a child a dollar to put in the plate can help them understand that our giving is part of being a disciple of Christ.

Being together in church as a family is powerful, and so is the example of a godly parent outside of the church building. In the UMC, we promise to support the church with our prayers, our presence, our gifts, our service, and our witness. Do you know the power of your own witness? When a child is watching you, does that encourage you to follow Christ? When you pray, when you read your Bible, when you serve, are little eyes observing you? When your children see you give, do they learn something about generosity from you? When you turn the other cheek, when you choose love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness, and self-control, do they see it? If so, that is a powerful witness.

When we baptize children in the UMC, we put them on a path to later have the opportunity to confirm that decision and choose to follow Christ for themselves. By bringing children to be baptized, families can choose together to serve the Lord.

We have the opportunity right here, right now, to say, "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord." This is our opportunity to show our children that they can be passionate, world-transforming disciples of Jesus Christ. My prayer and my decision for my own household is that we will choose the Lord. And I pray that you and your household will make the same decision. Let's pray.

MEMORY VERSE:

Joshua 24:15 "...Choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve....But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord." (NIV)

REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

1. Do you know your parents' faith stories (if they have one)?
2. What influence did your parents have on your faith? What decisions did they make for you? (such as being baptized, confirmed, or even attending church at all.)
3. What are the benefits when a whole family serves God?
4. How can you help your family worship and serve God together?