

SERVE THE LORD WITH GLADNESS



***“Make a joyful noise unto the Lord all ye lands.
Serve the Lord with gladness.”***

There has never been a time in the history of this earth when so many people are so certain that they are serving God.

You could say the world is being torn apart by people... millions of people who are rising up in the name of God... “to bring down the mighty from their seats and exalt those of low degree.” Never has this earth seen so many people who are willing to die in the service of God. And we’re only seeing the beginning. As this thing heats up, all kinds of martyrs are going to be made on both sides of this worldwide conflict. Martyred men, and women, and even children who are intent on serving God. To say nothing of all the victims.

What’s wrong with this picture?

Where is God in all this?

It’s not as if the Lord hadn’t warned us of days like this...

He spoke of a time when whoever kills you will think he’s doing God’s service. He announced a time when nation would rise against nation and kingdom against kingdom along with false Messiahs.

Everybody’s busy serving God.

It’s so easy to say, “Well, I’m serving the real God and I’m serving him in the right way.” And look down our noses at all those fanatical fools who are upsetting the equilibrium of the world.



Let's have an honest look at our own service to God.

How do we serve God - with gladness - at a time like this?

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How do you do that?

“On the way to Jerusalem he was passing along between Samaria and Galilee.”

Luke 17:11

Now Samaria was not a safe place for any Jew to be. These Samaritans who occupied the territory between Galilee and Jerusalem hated the Jews because they'd been belittled and demeaned by them for centuries. Any sensible Jew, who wanted to travel safely from Galilee to Jerusalem, would go around Samaria, not through it.

The Samaritans were serving God their way and felt justified giving the Jews a hard time. The Jews were serving God their way and felt justified in staying as far away as possible from those “creeps”.

Jesus ignored all this.

When he went from Galilee up to Jerusalem, he didn't take the long route - way around Samaria. He went right through. He's nearing the border - still in Jewish country, but close to Samaria.

“And as he entered a village, he was met by ten lepers, who stood at a distance and lifted up their voices and said, ‘Jesus, Master, have mercy on us.’ When he saw them, he said to them, ‘Go and show yourselves to the priests.’ And as they went they were cleansed. Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice; and fell on his face at Jesus' feet, giving him thanks. Now he was a Samaritan.”

Luke 17:12-16



What was this Samaritan doing hanging around with Jews? Samaritans and Jews just don't mix. But these ten men had something that made them outcasts in both camps.

They were the forgotten ones in both worlds.

The Samaritans were “serving” God and hated Jews, but they didn’t want any lepers around, not even Samaritan lepers.

The Jews were “serving” God and hated Samaritans, but they didn’t want any lepers around, not even Jewish lepers.

If you are a leper, you don’t belong anywhere. All you can do is hang around other lepers.

But here comes this Jew, who doesn’t care whether you’re a Jew, or a Samaritan, or a leper...

...walks right through Samaria whenever he feels like it -even if the Samaritans tell him to shove off and leave their village and he’s not afraid of lepers.

He’s serving the Father with gladness - angels walk with him!

The lepers can see that this man is different.

“Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!”

“Go show yourselves to the priests.”

So off they go, those Jewish lepers, with a Samaritan leper tagging along. When suddenly one guy looks at his hands and says, “Hey, look at this! I’m healed!” “So am I”, shouts another. “Hallelujah!” shouts another. And they pick up the pace toward the synagogue. The Samaritan stops, turns around, and starts shouting praises to God at the top of his lungs.

**This guy is making a joyful noise unto the Lord.
He’s serving the Lord with gladness.**

He falls on his face at Jesus’ feet giving him thanks.



Now, if you were to ask those nine Jewish lepers who had just been healed whether they were serving God, they would answer, “Of course we’re serving God! We’re doing just what Jesus told us to do. We’re on our way to the priests.”

But there’s something missing here. And whenever this thing is missing, whether it’s in the nine lepers or in you or in me, our “service to God” takes on a hard edge, becomes callous, self-righteous, false.

These guys forgot how to say, “thank you”.

They took the gift and forgot the giver.

No thanks.

No praise.

No real joy.

I'm busy, busy, busy –

I'm busy serving God with a heart that's full of me instead of God because I don't know how to say, “thank you”.

Service to God begins not with being a hero or a martyr.

It begins and ends where it did for that Samaritan leper who praised God with a loud voice, threw his life down at Jesus' feet giving him thanks.

The first step in serving God is to thank him and demonstrate your thanks.

The second step in serving God is to thank him and demonstrate your thanks.

The third step in serving God is to thank him and demonstrate your thanks.

Without these three steps all service to God turns into something false, something dangerous.

On the other hand, if you serve by thanking him, you will end up at the right place at the right time. As long as you're thanking God with your life, the Spirit of God will rest on you. You will bring good news to the poor, release to the captives, sight to the blind, freedom to the oppressed. You will create hope wherever you go.

Of course, it's not enough just to say the words. The Pharisee who said, “God, I thank thee that I am not like other men”, was not thanking God! He was too full of himself to thank God. If he had really been thanking God, he could not have looked down his nose at the tax collector.

How can you serve God and hate your neighbor?

So we discipline ourselves. We start at the cross...and remember that body broken for us, that blood shed for us, offering ourselves back in thanksgiving.

You get up in the morning. “Thank you, Father, for this new day.”

You sit down to breakfast. “Thank you, Father, for this food.”

You sing praises to God as you drive to work.

You start appreciating everything anybody does for you.

The waitress - give her a good tip.

The mailman.

The cashier at the grocery store.

The cleaning staff.

Above all - your wife, husband, child, friend.
You discipline yourself to think and live thanksgiving until it's your second nature, until your heart learns that the joy of the Lord is your only strength.

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There's only one way to serve the Lord with gladness -by learning to say, “thank you” to God all the time with our mouths with our lives.

If you're not serving God with a thankful heart - a really thankful heart, you're not serving God, even if you are giving away all you have and offering your body to be burned.

Jesus served his father with gladness.

The Samaritan leper served the Lord with gladness.

And so can we.

All we have to do is form the habit, the discipline, of thanking God all the time in everything we do.

If you're serving God with a thankful heart, you won't be afraid of Samaritans, lepers, Muslims, or anyone else.

You'll walk through this troubled world with angels at your side.

You will serve the Lord with gladness.

Prayer: Lord, help us to be thankful...to not just take your gifts and forget you, the wonderful giver. May we always remember as we serve you and as we interact with others (especially other believers) how good, how generous, how merciful you have been to us. And yes, may we form the habit of thanking you all the time, in everything we do, for everything that happens. May we say “thank you, thank you” not only with our mouths but with our lives, demonstrating our thanks to you and to this world. As we walk through this life, facing our troubles, dealing with the wounded, lonely, broken, imperfect souls around us, may we truly serve you with gladness and be a joyful noise unto you. Amen.

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