

Let Us Search Our Ways

(Sermon Notes) By Warren Zehrung – 3/29/2014

It is appropriate that we search our ways throughout the year, but especially as Passover approaches in order to see whether or not we have the attributes of true Children of God. Could it be that many of us have grown complacent and too self-assured of our stand with God?

Jeremiah lamented over the fall of Jerusalem and the scattering of Judah. He asked the question, “Why did Jerusalem fall apart when everything seemed to be going so well?” He calls on the people to examine their part in the transgressions. What was wrong in Jerusalem? When our ways please God – He blesses us and He protects us. Why did God withdraw His blessing and support? The answer was the same then and now. It was because our ways **did not please God**.

The title of the sermon is from this verse:

Lamentations 3:

40 Let us **search and try our ways**, and **turn again** to the Lord.

With Passover approaching, a key part of our preparation is a meticulous **examining** of ourselves, our attitudes and actions, and then for us to “turn again,” which means to **repent**. Yes, repentance is a big part of Passover preparation. Perhaps Looking at ourselves is “not our favorite” part of our spiritual lives. Actually though, Looking at Ourselves can be a very positive experience.

Ezekiel 33:

11 Say unto them, As I live, saith the Lord GOD, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live: **turn ye, turn ye** [repent] from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel?

Why do we need to take a look at ourselves? There is the answer: to turn again to the Lord. This is not just sentiments – direct action is called for.

Lamentations 3:

41 Let us lift up our heart with our hands unto God in the heavens.

In our early development within the Body of Christ, we began to come out of the world. We then began to learn about God's Law - the Sabbath, the Holy Days and the Plan of God. Unfortunately, some of our brethren thought that they had arrived with nothing more to do. Some brethren, erroneously, looked down on others who had not been given that wonderful knowledge.

Isaiah 55:

7 Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him **return** [repent] unto the LORD, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.

8 For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD.

9 For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.

* At Passover time we **search our ways**.*

1 Corinthians 11:

27-28 Wherefore whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. But let a man **examine himself**, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup.

What are we to look for in examining ourselves? What questions do we ask ourselves?

“Which bad habits have I overcome since last year?” Or, “Am I more careful about the language I use?”

In the past, we may have asked ourselves **simple** questions like those. But, let’s get serious! Questions such as those are not wrong – but they are not honestly focusing on the overall picture. What we need to ask ourselves is how does God see us? It is of the utmost importance that our evaluation of ourselves – match God's assessment of us. We welcome and desire His involvement in our lives. How do we measure ourselves against the word of God?

Psalm 26:

2 **Examine me, O LORD**, and prove me; try my reins and my heart.

As we **Search Our Ways** let’s be sure to elicit God’s intervention and obtain His help. It is of the utmost importance that our evaluation of ourselves matches God's evaluation of us. We welcome and desire His involvement in our lives.

Psalm 139:

23 **Search me, O God**, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts:

24 And see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.

How can we see ourselves for what we are as God sees us when our hearts are desperately wicked? So, Jesus says to us that we need to take a closer look, and deeply and diligently examine ourselves... The Lord looked down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there were any that did understand, and seek God.

Romans 3:

11 There is no one that understands, there is no one that seeks after God.

12 They are all gone aside, they are all together become filthy: there is no one that does good, no, not one. (Psalm 14:2-3)

To us that might seem like a harsh assessment. But it is accurate. From God’s perspective there is none that does good. Sometimes, we sit around and think that we are doing pretty good. Why is that? It is because we are unable to be objective. We think we are objective in our evaluation of ourselves – but we are not!

Jeremiah 17:

9 The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?

We don’t always have our motivations in line with God’s Will. That is why we must continually be taking a look at ourselves. Satan wants us to think that we are sitting pretty – but could we also be coming short when it comes to what we should be doing? Because we are carnal flesh – sometimes it seems like something is **a good way to go** – but we are completely off-base as far as God is concerned.

Proverbs 14:

12 There is a way which seems right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death.

We need to change from the way that we were when we were in the world. But the question is: “How do we honestly, and thoroughly, examine ourselves?” We tend to examine ourselves on the points that we excel in:

“Do I keep the Sabbath?” Check!

“Do I fight and kill?” Of course not!

“Have I robbed any banks?” Nope!

You see I am scoring 100% on my self-examination.

How can we have a deep and accurate introspection of our spiritual condition? How can we know the state of our heart?

Psalm 51:

6 Behold, thou desire truth in the inward parts: and in the **hidden part** thou shalt make me to know wisdom.

The closest we can come to being **objective** in a self-evaluation is to compare ourselves to the Holy Scriptures with the help and guidance of **God’s Spirit**. Sometimes we don’t see our sins for their severity.

Passover and Unleavened Bread not only picture putting away sin, but they picture putting **ON** Christ. Are we actively and regularly putting ON Christ?

Ephesians 4:

22-23 Put off concerning our former conduct - the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; And be renewed in the spirit of your mind.

Could it be that within God’s Church we are in danger of making the mistake of speaking religious sounding words but in fact exhibiting very little Christian substance? When we measure that which passes for religious practice in many of our congregations today – it is only a pretense of true Godly faith. Can it be that we are doing just enough to fool only the most superficial of adherents – and ourselves at the same time?

Where is the seriousness, the faith, the urgency, the reconciliation, the mercy, the humility, the zeal, the sacrifice, the honest introspection, the giving, the caring, the integrity, the spirituality, the submission, the yieldedness, the forgiveness, and the crucial concern for our brother and sister?

This is not at all a comprehensive list of sins and shortcomings. – Make your own list – starting with your obvious (and not so obvious weaknesses).

Let’s be more specific in the way we **search and try our ways**. Let’s ask ourselves questions like:

- * Have I put God first in everything?
- * Have I used God’s name in a way that He does not intend we use it?
- * Do I use my religion to get my way?
- * Is the Sabbath day kept holy by me?
- * Have I shown proper respect and obedience to parents and law?
- * Do I allow anger – even hatred – to fester in my heart?
- * Am I faithful to my marriage vow as well as my baptismal vow?

- * Am I guilty of misappropriating the things of others – their time, their parking place, their honor or respect?
- * Have I been careful to avoid all falsehood, lying, alcoholism, dishonesty, meanness, gambling, cruelty...?
- * Do I tend to use my position to take advantage of others?
- * Did I visit any who were sick, elderly or imprisoned?

James 1:

27 Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit [with aid and care] the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world.

- * When did I last put my reputation and life on the line?

1 John 3:

16 Hereby perceive we the love of God, because He laid down His life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.

- * Who did I serve in a meaningful way this year?

When we have the opportunity to bring something meaningful and helpful to the attention of one of the brethren – and we do not do it – We've robbed them of a blessing. Our faith is directly linked to how we serve and interact with others.

I heard a minister in one of the big groups misrepresent this basic principle that God has given us. He said, "We do need to examine ourselves, because we need to understand that only when we put God first in our lives, and then put our relationships with others second, are we really going to have the happiness that God wants us to have." That is a direct quote:

You might say – I agree with that statement. Okay – so do I – but let's take a look at what is being said... He said, "we put God first in our lives" – we all wish to do that. How do we do that?

You put God first in all your own personal decisions – the decisions and actions that nobody else knows about... Here is where the minister went off base... He then said, "...then put our relationships with others second."

Brethren, please understand this principle about our Faith – When we relate to others in a Godly way, when we serve others as Jesus Christ served us – we are NOT putting God last, that does not subordinate God to second place.

How we serve our fellow man – is how we serve God.

- * Do I remember that it is a false faith that says: "You and Me Lord – forget the others!"

Do we realize that love of the brethren – according to the 10 Commandments – is a salvational issue? God is very straightforwardly telling us that, to attain a place in His Kingdom, we must love one another.

So how can we really tell if we truly love the brethren? We certainly don't want to find out too late! Here is the answer:

That is what Matthew 25:40 means—

Matthew 25:

- 40** The King [Jesus] shall answer and say unto them, truly I say unto you, In as much as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it **unto me**.
- 41** Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels:
- 42** For I was an hungry, and ye gave me no food: I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink:

We do put God first when serving others. We do put God first **in our** relationships with others. We do put God first when our motivations are based on Godly principles. That is **not** putting God second.

1 John 4:

- 12** No man hath seen God at any time. If we **love one another**, God dwells in us, and his love is perfected in us.

1 John 4:

- 20** If a man say, I love God, and hates his brother, he is a liar: for he that loves not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?

In the days of the Worldwide Church of God, the concept of "love" was considered as almost entirely Protestant concept. Never mind, that the **Ten Commandments** are an integral part of the Love of God — and the Protestants do not possess that concept.

Though the Protestants attempt to practice loving their neighbor, they lack the Spirit of God which is crucial to fully **implement** the Ten Commandments in their actions. It becomes mostly talk... For Protestants it is all about sentiments, and feelings...

Romans 13:

- 8** Owe no man anything, but to love one another: for he that loves another hath fulfilled the law.
- 9** For this, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Thou shalt not covet; and if there be any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, namely, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.
- 10** Love works no ill to his neighbor: therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.
- 11** And that, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep: for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed.

We are in the end time... and time is very short.

Romans 13:

- 12** The night is far spent, the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light.
- 13** Let us walk honestly, as in the day; not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying.
- 14** But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfill the lusts thereof.

As we grow in spiritual maturity we learn to view ourselves more and more as God sees us. We no longer justify ourselves — but ask to be justified by the blood of Jesus Christ. We ask ourselves how much we have taken on a resemblance spiritually to Jesus Christ, our older brother — to how much our thoughts and actions compare to His.

Does God see us as humble and respectful of Him? We show our humility and our respect for His law by the way we feel about one another.

Galatians 5:

- 14** For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this; Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.
- 15** But if ye bite and devour one another, take heed that ye be not consumed one of another.

How can we have a correct self-observation, without deceiving ourselves? Perhaps, we think that we know our spiritual condition as well as it can possibly be known.

*Have I **forgiven** those who opposed me?

A hard question to ask ourselves is: “Am I forgiving others, as God is forgiving me?”

The first thing that Jesus expounded on, after teaching the disciples how to pray, was on forgiveness:

Matthew 6:

- 14** For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you.

So, we find that forgiveness is contingent; because we do not have forgiveness unless and until we forgive others.

Matthew 6:

- 15** But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

*Did I take a stand against injustice – and make it count?

*Did I cause peace to cease?

Matthew 5:

- 9** Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God.

There are differing kinds of peace: inner peace, peace with God and peace with man. I can **snap** at someone — and in an instant — peace is gone.

Peace is a gift from God.

John 14:

- 27** Peace I leave with you, **my peace** I give unto you: not as the world gives, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.

Leviticus 26:

- 6** And I will **give peace** in the land, and ye shall lie down, and none shall make you afraid: and I will rid evil beasts out of the land, neither shall the sword go through your land.

Colossians 1:

- 19-20** For it was the Father’s good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him, and through Him to reconcile all things to Himself, having made **peace** through the blood of His cross.

Reconciling with others is being a peace-maker. It is a duty.

2 Corinthians 5:

19 God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the **word of reconciliation**.

Matthew 5:

44 But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you;

Luke 17:

3 Take heed to yourselves: If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him; and if **he repent**, forgive him.

But we must have an attitude ready to forgive always.

*When did I actually encourage someone this year?

Encouragement is our everyday duty to one another:

Hebrews 10:

24 And let us consider one another to provoke [**stir up** - encourage] unto love and to good works:

25 Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting [**encouraging**] one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.

1 Thessalonians 5:

14 And we urge you, brothers, admonish the idle, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with them all.

*Was I ashamed of the Gospel? Did I take a stand for the Gospel truth at every opportunity?

Mark 8:

38 Whosoever therefore shall be **ashamed** of me and of **my words** in this adulterous and sinful generation; of him also shall the Son of man be **ashamed**, when he cometh in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.

Romans 1:

16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for **it is the power of God unto salvation** to everyone that believes;

*Have I fully submitted my will to God's will?

Matthew 6:

10 ... Thy **will** be done in earth, as it is in heaven.

On Passover Jesus prayed:

Luke 22:

42 Saying, Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless **not my will**, but thine, be done.

*Is my relationship with God sincere and truthful?

1 Corinthians 5:

8 Therefore let us keep **the feast** [Passover and Unleavened Bread], not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness; but with the unleavened bread of **sincerity and truth**.

Brethren, we cannot let down. How quickly do we see our own sins? How ready are we to go to God and repent of our shortcomings? Do we treat it lightly – saying God knew how I was when He called me?

Or, do we immediately get on our knees and ask for God's mercy and forgiveness? A deep spiritual evaluation of our selves should cut us to the bone. We should acknowledge our sin at once – and call on Christ's blood to cover it. What a sobering thought.

Are God the Father and Jesus Christ living in us – does my life reflect their presence within me?

Talk is cheap – good intentions are cheaper -but God is not fooled by them:

Galatians 6:

- 7** Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man sows, that shall he also reap.

A man is the sum and product of his life's choices.

Isaiah 29:

- 13** The Lord said, Forasmuch as this people draw near me with **their mouth**, and with their lips do honour me, but have removed their heart far from me, and their fear toward me is taught by the precept of men.

As we approach Passover, a good yardstick to sincerely examine our Christian progress is to measure our disposition toward all other people – do we love them as God intends? Do we desire for all men to attain the Kingdom of God. God does! Are we selfish, or have we grown in our desire for all men to be able to enjoy the riches of Jesus Christ, and the Kingdom of God?

A key part of our preparation for the Kingdom is to take a realistic and objective look at ourselves. Are we making progress toward the perfection of the fullness and stature of Jesus Christ?

Ephesians 4:

- 13** Until we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.

Paul was in the faith – his proof was that Christ was in his disciples.

If they would take a look at themselves – they would realize where they learned about Christ – it was from Paul.

2 Corinthians 13:

- 4** For though he was crucified through weakness, yet he lives by the **power of God**. For we also are weak in him, but we shall live with him by the power of God toward you.
- 5** Examine yourselves, [take a look at Ourselves] whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?
- 6** But I trust that ye shall know that we are not reprobates. Unapproved, worthless, castaways.
- 7** Now I pray to God that ye do no evil; not that we should appear approved, but that ye should do that which is honest, [Paul enlists some self deprecation here] though we be as reprobates.

As we grow in spiritual maturity we learn to view ourselves more and more as God sees us. We no longer justify ourselves – but ask to be justified by the blood of Jesus Christ. We ask ourselves how much we have taken on a spiritual resemblance to Jesus Christ, our older brother – and how much our thoughts and actions compare to His.

Let's be sure to spend time in prayer and self-examination as Passover approaches.

End: Let Us Search Our Ways