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WHAT'S YOUR EXCUSE

Author and wit Samuel Clemens — better known to American history by the nom de plume Mark Twain — used to tell the story of a man whose neighbor had a habit of borrowing tools and not returning them. One day the neighbor stopped by the man's house and asked whether he could borrow his axe. "No, you can't," replied the man. "Why not?" "I'm just about to eat some soup."

Puzzled, the neighbor said, "I don't see what one thing has to do with the other. You're not going to eat soup with an axe."

"That's true," said the man.

"But when a fellow's decided he's not going to do something, one excuse is as good as the next." As he often was in his observations of human nature, Mr. Clemens (or Mr. Twain, if you prefer) was right on the

money this time. Once people decide on a course of action, they'll justify it with any excuse — even one that makes as little logical sense as that in the story cited above. Herb Robison made excellent note of this in his sermon last Sunday evening, when he pointed out that older folks excuse themselves from interest in Bible study by saying, "That's for the young people," while the junior generation excuses themselves in exactly the opposite way: "That's for the old people." It's sad that people feel the need to excuse themselves from the things of Christ. But lest we begin feeling sorry for ourselves in our less successful efforts to evangelize, let's remember that Jesus Himself faced these excuses throughout His earthly ministry: "*Lord, let me first go*

and bury my father” (Luke 9:59); “Lord, I will follow You, but let me first go and bid them farewell who are at my house” (Luke 9:61); “But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions” (Matthew 19:22); “Nevertheless even among the rulers many believed in Him, but because of the Pharisees they did not confess Him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue” (John 12:42). All had determined what they were willing — or unwilling — to do. All found excuses to justify their choices. After nearly two decades of preaching the gospel, I sometimes think I’ve heard from people determined to disobey God every excuse the human mind can devise. Time and again, I’m proven wrong. People still manage to surprise me — even stun and shock me — with their ability to concoct rationalization after rationalization for not doing what God commands. But for the moment, let’s not talk about other people and their excuses. Let’s talk about ourselves, and ours. None of us are immune to the excuse cycle. All of us engage in rationalistic behavior —

probably more than we recognize, or are willing to admit to ourselves. We can, however, break the cycle by reversing it. As the man in the Mark Twain story demonstrates, excuses begin the moment we decide what we’re going to do, or not do. The key, therefore, is in that decision-making process. We can decide that we are going to love the Lord with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength (Mark 12:30), that we are going to observe all that He commands (Matthew 28:20), and that whatever we do — in word or deed — we will do it in His name, that is, by His authority (Colossians 3:17). If we make that decision wholeheartedly, and stand by it daily, we can begin to put excuses in the past. The challenge comes in those moments when God’s will as revealed in the Scriptures differs from our own — in those times when He demands a sacrifice we don’t want to make, or an obedience we don’t want to render. What do we do then? Do we tell the Lord we’re too busy eating soup, or do we hand over our axe? — Michael Rankins. I love Mary’s comment to the servants in regards to Jesus’ involvement

with the wine running out at the wedding in Cana. “Whatever He says to you, do it,” (Jn. 2:5). While this was the statement made directly to the servants at the wedding, this statement most certainly applies to all servants of the Lord. Mary had no idea what Jesus was going to do or say and was willing to leave it all in His hands, yet she felt compelled to prepare the servants with the proper attitude towards Him. Do whatever He says. What I love about this is Mary instructed the servants that this was the most appropriate response to His commands before she had any idea what He was even going to tell them! It teaches us a great lesson about obedience. Do you realize that obedience begins even before you ever read or hear a single command? “For Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the law of the LORD, and to do it, and to teach in Israel statutes and judgments,” (Ezra 7:10 KJV). “Remind them to be subject to rulers, to authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good deed,” (Titus 3:1). Are you prepared to obey whatever Jesus tells you? Have you already “purposed in your heart” (Dan. 1:8) that no matter what the command or nature of His instruction, you are fully prepared to follow Jesus?

Apparently the servants at the wedding took Mary’s advice to heart and prepared themselves to be in obedience before Jesus uttered a single word. How do we know? Notice the extent of their obedience to the first thing Jesus told them to do. “Jesus said to them, ‘Fill the waterpots with water.’ So they filled them up to the brim,” (Jn. 2:7). The evidence of one who has prepared their heart for obedience is seen in the extent of their obedience once put into action. How are you responding when Jesus commands you to “fill the waterpots with water” in regards to the various instructions you are receiving from Him? Are you filling them up to the brim or are you dumping in small amounts, looking over at Him to check to see if you’ve put in enough? Those who are prepared to obey are not only prepared to do whatever He says, but are prepared to obey His commands to the fullest extent possible, all the way up to the brim.

- Daniel Ruegg



MONTHLY CHALLENGE

DIRECTIONS: Each first Sunday of the month, we will have challenges that you should attempt to complete by the end of the month. If we all, as members, complete these challenges, our church will grow in spirit and in number.

1) Praying Through Psalms Challenge

Ephesians 3:4-5 *"By referring to this, when you read you can understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, which in other generations was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit."* While the Old testament was guiding the Jewish nation towards God's promised messiah, it was the New Testament that finally revealed how Jesus is our ultimate redeemer. In light of this, as we study and read the old testament, it is amazing how we can see shadows and glimpses of Him and His saving gospel hinted at and revealed in the pages of the old testament. Spend time this month reading books from the old testament, and see if you can find further pictures and references to Jesus there. See if you can trace themes and patterns in various books that help shed light on the saving power of Christ. "Now these things happened to them as an example, and they were written for our instruction, upon whom the ends of the ages have come." 1 Cor. 10:11

2) USING YOUR BIBLE IN THE WORLD

Share the following verses with someone who does not attend this congregation at least twice this month:

Isaiah 6:1-8

"In the year of King Uzziah's death I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, lofty and exalted, with the train of His robe filling the temple. Seraphim stood above Him, each having six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one called out to another and said, 'Holy, Holy, Holy, is the LORD of hosts, the whole earth is full of His glory.' And the foundations of the thresholds trembled at the voice of him who called out, while the temple was filling with smoke. Then I said, 'Woe is me, for I am ruined! Because I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts.' Then one of the seraphim flew to me with a burning coal in his hand, which he had taken from the altar with tongs. He touched my mouth with it and said, 'Behold, this has touched your lips; and your iniquity is taken away and your sin is forgiven.' Then I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, 'Whom shall I send, and whom will go for Us?' Then I said, 'Here am I. Send me!'"