

Introduction:

We have too often missed the boat regarding what Jesus' life and death was all about. Why did Jesus come to earth? That's easy, isn't it? We know **Luke 19:10**. "The Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost" (ESV). But follow that up with another question. Why did the Son of Man come to seek and save the lost? Think about that for just a moment. Why did the Son of Man come to seek and save the lost? So we can go to heaven, right? WRONG! Don't misunderstand, because Jesus saved us, we do have a home reserved in heaven (cf. **I Peter 1:3-5**). While heaven is a benefit we receive, it was not the reason Jesus saved us. Rather Jesus saved us so we could perform good deeds right here and now on earth. **Ephesians 2:8-10** makes it quite clear. God recreated us in Christ Jesus not merely to save us and help us to heaven. He recreated us so we might walk in the good deeds He prepared beforehand. Now read **Titus 2:11-14**. Why did God extend His grace? To train us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions. To train us to live godly, self-controlled and upright lives. To purify for Himself a people zealous for good deeds. According to **Titus 3:8, 14**, God's people must carefully devote themselves to good deeds. According to **II Timothy 2:20-21** we are to cleanse ourselves, not to go to heaven, but in order to be ready for every good deed. Notice the Hebrew writer's prayer in **Hebrews 13:20-21**. The prayer was not merely that God would get the Christians to heaven, but that we would be equipped with every good thing in order to do His will. We need to understand something. God did not save us so that some day off in the future we might get to go to heaven even though we don't deserve it. God saved us so that right here and now, we individual Christians might do His good deeds on this earth. God did not save us so we could gather on Sundays and discuss truth. He did not save us so we could simply gain knowledge. He did not save us so we could be theologically correct. He saved us by His truth, granting us His knowledge so that we might act. He saved us so we would be a force of good deeds on this earth. But He did not save us so we might just do a good deed every now and then. He saved us, as **Titus 2:14** said, to purify for Himself a people Zealous for Good Deeds. That begs the question. What is "zeal"? How will we look when we are zealous? How do we develop zeal?

Discussion:

I. Defining "Zeal"

- A. The Biblical words translated "zeal" and "zealous" (zelos, zeloo, zelotes) all stem from the root word "zeo" which means "to boil with heat." Thus, "zeal" carries with it the idea of being on fire for something. In a negative sense, the word is used to speak of burning with envy or jealousy (e.g. **Acts 7:9; 17:5**). In a good sense, it is used to mean burning with desire for something good (e.g. **I Corinthians 12:31; 14:1, 39**). If we were going to use modern buzz words to describe zeal we would talk about someone being on fire or being passionate about something. In fact, this is demonstrated in contrast by the Laodiceans in **Revelation 3:19**. Jesus told the Laodiceans to "be zealous and repent" (ESV). This contrasts with the lukewarm state Jesus had described in **Revelation 3:15**. Instead of being lukewarm, Jesus wanted them to be on fire. He wanted them to be passionate about serving Him and His will.
- B. Perhaps it will help us to see some people described as zealous. Of course, we remember Jesus in **John 2:13-17**, in which the disciples remembered **Psalms 69:9** saying, "Zeal for your house will consume me" (ESV). Jesus' zeal was demonstrated by the inability to sit idly by. He had to act. Folks consumed with zeal cannot sit idly by; they have to act. Then there is the demonstration of Paul's zeal prior to becoming a Christian. **Philippians 3:6** says when he was following the old law he demonstrated his zeal by persecuting the church. **Acts 8:3** shows Paul's zeal. He entered house after house. He was active and persistent. According to **Acts 9:1ff**, Paul did not simply persecute those around him, he hunted Christians down. He was chasing them. Zeal is an ardent desire that causes an intense pursuit. Further we see Paul talk about his zealousness as a Jew in **Galatians 1:14**. He advanced beyond his peers. Those who are zealous are not satisfied with status quo and good enough. They excel and exceed because they are on fire.

II. A Zeal for Good Deeds

- A. God has not asked us merely to be zealous. He hasn't merely asked us to be positive and passionate in general. He hasn't asked us to be on fire for just anything. He has purified us in order

to have a zeal for good deeds (**Titus 2:14**). We must be on fire for good deeds. We must be so on fire that we just can't sit idly by while there is good to be done. We have to act. We are to hunt for and chase down opportunities to perform good deeds. We excel and exceed all others regarding good deeds. We don't do this because there is a church program or because we are part of some benevolent organization. We do this because we are Christians, because we have been purified to do this by God.

- B. Consider another metaphor God uses to give us this picture. In **Matthew 5:6**, Jesus said those who hunger and thirst for righteousness are blessed because they are the only ones who are ever satisfied. I think this verse demonstrates another flaw we have perpetuated along these lines. In this passage, Jesus is providing His plan of salvation. If someone wants to be made righteous, that is, saved and right with God, they must first be poor in spirit. They must recognize how badly they have messed up. They must see the bad deeds they have done. Then they must realize how they have absolutely nothing to offer God to pay for that. Therefore, they mourn, regretting and repenting of those deeds. Then, recognizing that they can only be changed if they submit to God, they become meek before God, surrendering their lives to Him. Then this next step is most surprising. Jesus did not say that they are to hunger and thirst for grace and mercy. No doubt, there is no way to be righteous apart from God's grace and mercy. But we are to hunger for righteousness. God's grace and mercy are not an end unto themselves. When we teach people, we often highlight the forgiveness they will be given. God however is not seeking merely to forgive people. He is seeking to forgive people so they may be set free to pursue righteousness. Jesus didn't die merely to wash our sins away, but so that being set free from sin we might live to righteousness (**I Peter 2:24**). If we really want to actively work in saving people, we cannot merely make them hungry for forgiveness, mercy and grace. Rather, we must make them hungry for righteousness. We must make them hungry for doing what is right and what is good. When they have that hunger, when they are starving to do what is right and good, they will seek God's mercy and grace but then they will move beyond that and walk in the good works God prepared beforehand.
- C. Having said this though, we need to recognize the place good deeds have in our salvation. According to **Titus 3:5**, we are not zealous for good deeds because we are trying to measure up and earn salvation. The fact is no amount of zeal for good deeds will earn us salvation. If we are trying to be saved by our own acts of righteousness, we will always fail. We are saved by God's grace when we are washed by the Holy Spirit in our baptism. I want you to notice what this means on a practical level for good deeds. We may be tempted to ask, "How many good deeds must I do in order to go to heaven?" That is the wrong question. The person who is zealous for good deeds won't ask this question. A zeal for good deeds and righteousness means I'm passionate about doing good, not just trying to be good enough to make the cut. If you find yourself saying, "How much do I have to do to be saved? How many assemblies do I have to attend? How much time do I have to spend in prayer? How much time do I have to spend studying the Bible? How many people do I have to help? How much hospitality do I have to perform?..." then you are not being zealous for good deeds. You're just trying to make the cut. Sadly, with this attitude, you won't make the cut. Only those who pursue righteousness and good deeds because they are hungering for righteousness and zealous for good deeds will be satisfied.

III. What do those zealous for good deeds look like?

- A. **Reliant upon God's grace: Isaiah 64:6** demonstrates a problem we have. On our own, if we simply start trying to pursue good deeds, it will never be anything more than filthy rags. If we are in our sins and just decide we are going to make a change but don't ever allow God to cleanse us of our unrighteousness, our good deeds do no good. Those who are truly zealous for good deeds begin by relying on God's grace. Isn't that the message of **Titus 2:11-14**? It is God's grace that cleanses us of our bad deeds and unrighteousness that then instructs us how to really pursue and be zealous for good deeds. Further, having been cleansed by God and now pursuing good deeds, we know it is God's grace that provides us with abundance so that we might then turn around and bestow blessings on others. That is the message of **II Corinthians 9:8-11**. This passage is specifically dealing with good deeds in helping others materially and financially. But it is true no matter what aspect of good deeds we are dealing with. Only the grace

of God allows us our abilities to teach, pray, encourage, exhort, help, strengthen, comfort others. If we are trying to be strong all on our own, we won't make it. But when we rely on God's grace and use the grace He has given us to work good deeds, He will increase His grace to us. If you want to develop your zeal for good deeds, start here by counting your blessings. Why not write a gratitude list every day of things for which you are thankful from God. As you realize what great things God has done for you, you will increase your desire to pass it along to others.

- B. **Accompanied by knowledge from God's word:** According to **Romans 10:2**, it is possible to have a zeal, but one that is not really and truly about God's good deeds. Our passion and fire does us no good if it is not also accompanied with knowledge from God. These Jews did not know or understand the grace of Jesus. Therefore, their zeal was about pursuing their own righteousness and saving themselves by their own good works. They did a lot of things, things we might even call good, but they were no good for them and no good for God. Thus, their seemingly good deeds were not really good. **II Timothy 3:16-17** says the Scripture equips us for every good work. Those who are really zealous for good deeds spend their time in the Word, seeking the equipping and training so they can know what is right and then pursue it. They allow the Word to teach them, reprove them, correct them and then discipline them in righteousness. We cannot develop a zeal for good deeds apart from God's word. Only by reading about what God has done for us and what God has asked of us in return can we have zeal for it.
- C. **Laboring fervently in prayer:** As Paul prayed in **II Thessalonians 2:16-17**, those who are zealous for good deeds pray that God will establish them and others in good deeds. But in addition to praying for our own good deeds the greatest good deed we can do for others is to pray for them and pray with them. As I prepared this lesson, one passage really caught my eye. **Colossians 4:12-13** describes Epaphras. Where the ESV speaks of him working hard for the brethren, the KJV and the NKJV translate that he had great zeal for the brethren. Notice what marked his great zeal. Epaphras was "always struggling on your behalf in his prayers" (ESV). The KJV says "laboring fervently." He was striving and working in prayer. How many of us, though, can describe our prayer life as striving or laboring fervently? Those who are truly zealous for good deeds do not merely try to go out and do good things; they make their deeds worthwhile by asking God to be part of their good deeds and asking God to bless others. So, if you want to develop a zeal for good deeds, start and end every day with prayer, asking God to establish your zeal, to provide you with opportunities and resources and to bless your deeds to be a blessing to others.
- D. **Anchored in service to others:** Perhaps the hardest thing about being zealous for good deeds is the fact that a life of good deeds is a life consumed with service for others. A great example of this is found in **II Corinthians 9:2**. What caused the Corinthians to commit to helping the brethren in Judea during their famine? It was their zeal. Consider the widows indeed about whom Paul spoke in **I Timothy 5:10**. Having a reputation for good works meant being hospitable, raising children, washing the saints' feet, caring for the afflicted. All of these are issues of service. They take sacrifice. Those who are zealous for good deeds are servants. If you want to develop a zeal for good deeds, you have to increase your humility and your willingness to serve.
- E. **Abounding in good deeds:** One of the greatest examples of being zealous for good deeds is Tabitha, also known as Dorcas, in **Acts 9:36-41**. **Acts 9:36** says she was full of good works. Some translations say abounding with good deeds. This may seem too obvious. However, I think we need to note that those who are zealous for good deeds don't just try to get one in every once in a while. Those who are zealous for good deeds abound in them. They are covered up with them. Consider the statement in **I Timothy 2:10**. Paul said good works are the fitting apparel for those who profess godliness. We should be so covered over with good deeds it is like we are clothed in them. The point behind this is that what people remember about us is not our jewelry, our power clothes, our fashion sense but our good works. **I Timothy 6:18** says we should be rich in good works. If you want to develop the zeal that produces an abundance of good works, you just have to start doing some good works. Even if you don't feel a zeal for it right now, fake it. Pretend to have a zeal and just do it. I love the phrase, fake it 'til you make it. That is how a zeal for good deeds is developed. Simply act today like you are zealous for good deeds by doing a good deed and then do another one and then do another one. Trust me; as you start gaining the fulfillment and satisfaction that comes from doing good, zeal will come.

F. **Bearing fruit that glorifies God: Matthew 5:16** says our good works are for the purpose of glorifying God. **John 15:8** says we glorify God by bearing fruit as His disciples. Those who are zealous for good deeds bear fruit that glorifies God. Think about what this means. It means good deeds are not in some kind of vacuum. Good deeds produce something. It may not always be tangible. It may be patience, joy or other fruit described in **Galatians 5:22-23** produced in our own lives. Then again, it may be some help in someone else's life. **Titus 3:14** said that helping out with urgent needs was being fruitful. At times, there will be something very tangible produced as well. Think again about Tabitha in **Acts 9:36-41**. When Peter came into the room where Tabitha's body lay, they didn't just describe her love, they were able to show tangible expressions of her love. They were able to show the garments she had made. We need to ask ourselves, can anyone point to something tangible regarding our good deeds? Then, when they have those tangible reminders of our good deeds, was our goal for them to glorify God and not us? If you want to develop a zeal for good deeds, focus on this goal for your good deeds. If your goal is to try to do enough good stuff to go to heaven, you will always be dragging. But if you spend your time praising God and trying to do things that will glorify Him, there will be no end or tiring from your good deeds.

Conclusion:

Are you passionate about good deeds? Are you on fire for the Lord's will? Are you starving to be and perform righteousness? Good. Keep that up. Don't grow weary in doing good for in the proper time the Lord will reward you (**Galatians 6:9**). But perhaps you are still overcome with bad deeds. Perhaps you are still in your sins and cannot imagine abounding in good because your sins seem so intense. This is exactly why Jesus died. He died so you could be set free from your bad deeds in order to pursue righteousness and have a zeal for good deeds. It all begins with entering Christ in baptism. That is when your conscience is cleansed from dead works so you may serve the living God full of good works (cf. **I Peter 3:21; Hebrews 9:13-14**). Of course, that is not the end. It is not, get baptized and suddenly all I ever do is good works. It is a growth process and some are baptized but still feel covered over in sin. We can help you in Christ overcome these sins and pursue righteousness. Why not let us know how we can help you be cleansed of your sins and pursue righteousness, being zealous for good deeds.