

HOW TO ENJOY GOD

A Devotional Meditation on Shmini (Eighth)

Leviticus 9:1-11:47; 2 Samuel 6:1-19; Job 1:20-22;
Mark 10:35-45; Luke 17:5-10; John 15:12-17; Acts 13:4-11, 14:19-23

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Christians emphasize that everything changed at the Cross. That is true. The blood of our Savior sealed the promises that his Father, our Creator, made to redeem this earth. His victory over the grave ensured that the resurrection would become reality for all who call upon the name of the Lord. And yet, Messiah's accomplishments did not change the way God does business with humanity.

This is, after all, the same Almighty God who took drastic action on those who stepped out of line, regardless whether they lived before or after the Cross. We might think of the priests Nadab and Abihu who died at the moment of their consecration when they offered unauthorized fire before the Lord. Uzzah also comes to mind. He's the man who died because he touched the Ark of the Covenant to keep it from falling off the ox cart on which the Israelites had placed it. Then there's King Uzziah, who was stricken with leprosy when he tried to do what only the priests are supposed to do by offering incense in the Temple.

After the Cross, we read of Ananias and Sapphira, who lost their lives when they lied to the apostles about the offering they presented from the sale of their land, and of Elymas the magician who was blinded because he spoke as a false prophet in opposition to the ministry of Paul and Barnabas.

With those examples in mind, what are we to think of this teaching by Yeshua?

"Will any one of you who has a servant plowing or keeping sheep say to him when he has come in from the field, 'Come at once and recline at table'? Will he not rather say to him, 'Prepare supper for me, and dress properly, and serve me while I eat and drink, and afterward you will eat and drink'? Does he thank the servant because he did what was commanded? So you also, when you have done all that you were commanded, say, 'We are unworthy servants; we have only done what was our duty.'"

Luke 17:7-10 ESV

This sounds more like the supposedly "angry God" of the Old Testament rather than the Jesus whom we like to call our friend. Yeshua's words might even make us think of what the pagans do to appease their gods in hope that they will bless the harvest, protect from natural disaster, or simply leave the people alone.

Yeshua didn't mean any of that, of course. We have a better idea of what he meant when we see in the previous verses that he was answering a specific question:



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The apostles said to the Lord, "Increase our faith!" And the Lord said, "If you had faith like a grain of mustard seed, you could say to this mulberry tree, 'Be uprooted and planted in the sea,' and it would obey you."

Luke 17:5-6 ESV

It seems the answer to cultivating faith the size of a mustard seed is in service to our God – the same kind of devoted service that prompted Job to cling to his Creator even when he had lost everything, saying only, "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return. The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD." (Job 1:21)

That's not a hopeless cry from the fatalistic worshipper of a capricious God, but the desperately hopeful proclamation of one who has lived in relationship with his Creator. Job had no understanding of why such unthinkable horrors had fallen on him, but he knew the only way through it all was by clinging more tightly to the only One worthy of service. It's the same kind of desperate hope that kept Aaron focused on the holy task of inaugurating the Tabernacle even after his two oldest sons died before his eyes. That same hope inspired Paul and Barnabas to proclaim, "through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God" (Acts 14:22), and continue ministering after an angry crowd stoned Paul and left him for dead.

The difference isn't actually what happened at the Cross, but what happened when the God of the Universe initiated his covenant of redemption with Abraham, the father of Israel. At that moment, the relationship between the Almighty and humanity shifted from one of patron and client to one of covenant partners. Abraham believed and obeyed God, and in that way became the friend of God. That friendship moved God to keep the covenant even when his human partners proved unfaithful and inconsistent. The seal of the covenant was and is the blood of Messiah – the Messiah who came not to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.

That's the context of serving the Living God. We do it because it's what our Lord taught us to do by his example. We don't do it because we're seeking a reward or recognition; we do it with the assurance that we are his regardless what may happen. In serving him, we learn to do as he did for others, just as he said:

"This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you. You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you. These things I command you, so that you will love one another.

John 15:12-17 ESV

This is the essence of the Kingdom of God. It's what he intended from the beginning. Protocol still matters, for he is the Holy God. We don't presume on our relationship as friends, as if he were our "bestie" or "homey" ready to cater to our every whim. Neither do we cower in fear of an unreachable Deity seeking any occasion to smite us. The answer

is somewhere in the middle: entering his house with reverence, respecting his rules, and learning to enjoy him as he enjoys us.