

The Old Hickory Bulletin

Old Hickory Church of Christ

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Set Your Face

When a political candidate sets his or her sights on the White House, it involves desire, planning, and diligent effort. Though there are pitfalls and obstacles along the way, fierce determination, “setting one’s face toward Washington,” is the only way to get there.

Jesus set His face to go to Jerusalem. His mind was set. He had unwavering determination. He was not going to vie for political position; He was not going to earn His fortune; He was not going for earthly Jerusalem. He had been there many times, but this time was different.

Jesus Set His Face to go to Jerusalem...to Die.

He was not going there for a vacation, not to see the sights, not even for a “holy pilgrimage,” Jesus was going to Jerusalem to endure a tortuous, agonizing death. He was going there because it was the Father’s will. “For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent me” (John 6:38).

Long ago, when it was God’s will for Jesus to come to earth, He set his face toward earth! While here, how many times He must have said, “I must be about my Father’s business.” That “business” included being crucified

for the sins of the world. To make it more personal, He set His face to die for you.

He had boldly predicted what was going to happen at Jerusalem. “Now, Jesus, going up to Jerusalem, took the twelve disciples aside on the road and said to them, ‘Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and to the scribes; and they will condemn Him to death, and deliver Him to the Gentiles to mock and to scourge and to crucify. And the third day He will rise again’” (Matthew 20:17-19). As you read Luke’s account, Jesus keeps pressing forward, day after day, knowing what awaited Him (Luke 13:33; 19:28).

Jesus remained firm in His commitment and determination in spite of His disciples trying to discourage Him from doing so. When he announced to them that He was going to Jerusalem to be crucified, Peter was the first to say, “This shall not happen!” (Matthew 16:21- 23). But Jesus was not about to let misguided disciples distract Him from His determined course.

Jesus was determined in spite of the fact that some people, the Samaritans, rejected Him because He had set his face toward Jerusalem (Luke 9:53). Even though the majority rejected Him (John 1:11), it never swayed Him from doing the will of the Father. “Now it came to pass, when the time had come for Him to be received up, that He steadfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem.”(Luke 9:51)

We, Too, Need to Set Our Face Toward Jerusalem.

There’s no need to face Jerusalem when we pray as they did in the Old Testament (Daniel 6:10; 2 Chronicles 6:34-35). There’s no need to make a pilgrimage to the “holy city” since Jerusalem is no longer considered that by God (John 4:21). Oh, we can go there and see the sights spoken of in the Bible, but there is no inherent holiness obtained by so doing.

The New Testament speaks of a spiritual, heavenly Jerusalem that people come to when they become followers of Christ. “But you have come to

Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven, to God the Judge of all, to the spirits of just men made perfect" (Hebrews 12:22-23).

You don't become a part of the body of Christ, the church, a part of the spiritual, heavenly Jerusalem, a Christian, by accident, or by birth. It takes fierce determination to make the good confession, to repent of sins, to be baptized into Christ, and walk in newness of life.

We Must Set Our Faces Toward the Heavenly City.

Especially in the Book of Revelation, the final dwelling place of all God's faithful children, heaven, is described as the "New Jerusalem." "He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he shall go out no more. I will write on him the name of My God and the name of the city of My God, the New Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God. And I will write on him My new name" (Revelation 3:12; 21:2; 21:10).

If we're ever going to make it to heaven, we're going to have to set our faces toward it. This is what patriarchs like Abraham did (Hebrews 11:10). Like so many before us, we need to "desire a better, that is, a heavenly country." "Therefore, God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them" (Hebrews 11:16).

A Final Plea

Friends, don't set your face on this earth. Remember, we are strangers and pilgrims here. "These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. For those who say such things declare plainly that they seek a homeland" (11:13-14). This world is the journey, not the destination!

If you set your face toward heaven, like Jesus, you're certain to encounter opposition along the way. Like the Samaritans' attitude toward Jesus, not everyone will be happy with your decision to be a Christian, maybe those in your own family (Matthew 10:36). Set your face and fix your determination anyway! Like Jesus' disciples, sometimes the Lord's people have their minds set on earthly things (Matthew 16:23; Philippians 3:18-19). Don't allow others to discourage you. Set your face and press on.

May God help us to set our faces toward heaven. Let us say with Isaiah, "For the Lord God will help Me; therefore, I will not be disgraced; therefore, I have set My face like a flint. And I know that I will not be ashamed" (Isaiah 50:7). And let us say with Paul, "I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 3:14). Let us sing and mean it – "I have decided to follow Jesus. Though none go with me, I still will follow."

Set your face toward Jerusalem and ...keep on marching toward Zion!

- Gary M. Ogden, via Biblical Insights; Vol. 6 No. 9, Sept., 2006

Gods of This World: Self

Human beings have either idolized or demonized themselves throughout history. These days it seems that the pendulum has swung firmly toward the "idolized" side. Optimism about human capabilities has led to people making a god out of themselves!

This idolization has taken on many forms. Many people today accept a more relativistic view of life, believing that "what is right for you is right for you and what is right for me is right for me." According to this perspective, right and wrong is entirely dependent on individual belief and choice, placing the individual in the position of God. Others place their confidence

in the dictates of government or science, which are themselves institutions or structures of men.

This trend is also prevalent in religious beliefs, especially in America. Since “secular” and “sacred” have been separated, according to society, and Americans are all about “choice,” how one views the “sacred” is now entirely up to them. People are encouraged to “join the church of your choice.” To believe that only one belief system is true is considered narrow-minded and elitist; instead, people are encouraged to develop a “cafeteria-style” belief system, choosing for themselves elements of various religions to accept while discarding whatever does not suit them. In all of these ideals, the main “chooser” is the self. It is all about what one believes or wants to believe!

This tendency can even manifest itself in people who profess the Bible as their spiritual standard in life. They are more than willing to follow what the Bible says in matters with which they are in agreement, but if a given Bible passage contradicts their belief system, or asks them to do something they do not want to do, they will either ignore the passage, attempt to declare the passage irrelevant to the present day, or distort and pervert the passage in an attempt to justify their perspective.

These all represent a form of idolatry, condemned as a work of the flesh (Galatians 5:19-21). Granted, people who believe these various ideas about the self are not falling down before a statue, but it remains clear who really is “in charge” in their lives. The self is the one making the decisions. The self, in the end, is the final judge and arbiter. Whether one is a relativist, a follower of the general tendencies of society, or a selective interpreter of the Scriptures, self is placed in the position of God, and the One True God and what He teaches is secondary at best. And it is this very thing that the One True God condemns as idolatry-- when man puts anything in front of God and serves it instead!

As in all of these discussions, we must recognize that human beings and their capabilities are not all bad. After all, God made mankind in His image

(Genesis 1:26-27). Of all the creation, God endowed man alone with the capability of reason and discernment, and He certainly expects mankind to use it (Romans 1:18-20, Acts 17:24-29)! Furthermore, God does not coerce or compel people; instead, He does exhort mankind to choose (Matthew 11:28-30, 1 Timothy 2:4). Nevertheless, any time man takes a good thing and turns it into the ultimate, he commits idolatry. God has given mankind the faculty of choice, but the choice is not whatever the self wants it to be. Instead, the choice is between serving God or serving unrighteousness (Romans 6:16-23). While man does have reason, he is not capable of rendering proper judgment on every occasion -- as Jeremiah says, it is not within man to direct his own steps (Jeremiah 10:23). Solomon clearly establishes that there is a way that seems right to a man-- but its way is not life, but death (Proverbs 14:12)!

It is clear that God made man to think and reason, and that God has endowed mankind with free will to decide whether to serve Him or not. These abilities and freedoms were not given so that man would exalt himself and his abilities to a divine level. Instead, man is to recognize that he is limited, finite, and quite prone to sin (Isaiah 55:8-9, Romans 3:9-23). Humans are to recognize that there is a God who is greater than they are, and that they should look to Him for guidance and instruction (Acts 17:24-29, Proverbs 3:5-8). That guidance and instruction is now found in the Scriptures that God gave to man to equip him for every good work (2 Timothy 3:16-17). The Bible should be consulted in order to learn what God would have us to do and not as a pretext to justify whatever it is that we desire (cf. 2 Peter 3:15-16, Jude 1:10). In all things, we must remember that we are the creation and God the Creator -- He is the Potter, we are the clay (Romans 9:20-21). Let us not turn ourselves into gods; instead, let us serve the One True God!

- Ethan R. Longhenry

Shamgar had an ox goad,
David had a sling,

Dorcas had a needle,
Rahab had some string,
Mary had some ointment,
Moses had a rod,
Have you some small talent
You will dedicate to God?

- > "Behavior is a mirror in which we show our heart's image!"
 - > "It is better to be short of cash than to be short of character!"
 - > "If your Christianity is worth having, it should be worth sharing!"
 - > "Christians never meet for the last time!"
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THIS WEEK'S LESSONS: Gregg Needham will be the guest speaker today, as the Smalley's are on vacation.