

## 1 The KEY

- To The Promises of God

## 2 Introduction

- Back in July, after tennis great Serena Williams won at Wimbledon, she exclaimed, "I want to thank Jehovah God."
- As many of you know, it's not uncommon for professional athletes to express gratitude to the Creator for a successful play in their field of competition.
- Tim Tebow is a prime example

## 3 Introduction

- However, in Williams' case, whoever wrote the headline about her post-match victory exclamation may have misunderstood what these expressions of faith are all about.
- The headline read, "Wimbledon winner Serena Williams' secret weapon: 'Jehovah God.'"

## 4 Pics

## 5 Headlines

- As is often the case in journalism, the headline is written by an editor, not by the reporter who wrote the article.
- The article itself, while explaining Williams' involvement with her faith in God, never describes God as "a weapon" in some sort of arsenal to which the tennis star has access.
- Whoever wrote the headline, however, sacrificed accuracy in favor of a punchy eye-catcher.

## 6 Headlines

- But headlines are written to get people to read the articles below them, and, from that perspective, the headline worked.
- When we saw the headline, we read the column to see if, in fact, this was what Williams claimed.
  - Does Williams really believe that God is her "secret weapon?"
  - The answer is no, but wouldn't it be pretty cool if there was anecdotal evidence that God can be persuaded to do whatever we want, and whenever we want it.

## 7 Meeting God!

- Over the holidays, I climbed to the top of Mount Sinai to get close enough to talk to God.
- Looking up, I say, "God, what does a million years mean to you?"
- God replied, "A minute."
- I ask God another question, "And what does a million dollars mean to you?"
- God said, "A penny."

- Then I ask God, "Can I have a penny?"
- God said, "In a minute."

## 8 **Controlling God**

- According to Janet Shaver, "many still believe God is a genie in a bottle."
- Likewise, there are lots of people, who seek to make a deal with God.
  - A cartoon a few years ago showed a man playing poker, pushing money into the pot. A bubble above his head showed that he was silently praying, . . .
  - "Lord, if you let me the win this one time, I promise I'll never gamble again."

## 9 **Controlling God**

- Perhaps we've never been in that particular situation, but there are others that we might identify with.
- Maybe, while waiting for a diagnosis from a set of troubling physical symptoms, we've promised God that if God gives us a pass this time, we'll eat better, exercise regularly, stop smoking, go to church more often or something similar.
- Or, perhaps we think of religion itself as a kind of bargain with God.
- We attend church, pray, go the extra mile sometimes, try to live an upright life and so on, and, in return, we want God to see that things go reasonably well for us.

## 10 **Controlling God**

- Ohio's Governor John Kasich, who last year put himself forward as a presidential candidate, is known as a Christian conservative, but with the emphasis on "Christian."
- He has acknowledged that a candidate's faith normally factors into politics, but he's also spoken of how he's grown in his faith over what it once was.

## 11 **Controlling God**

- "Like [for] many, many young people," Kasich said, "the Lord became a rabbit's foot for me: Pull it out on test day, pull it out on Election Day. 'Come on, Lord,' I got the rabbit's foot."
- Reportedly he has a bigger view of his faith now, but the "let's make a deal" notion was a stage along the way, as it can be for many of us.

## 12 **Bargaining with God**

- We may also be aware of the "bargain-with-God" mentality when someone stops coming to church, and even stops believing in God after something bad happens to that person or to a loved one.
- The former Christian explains the change by saying, "Well, if God was really loving (or really existed, really cared about me or was really powerful, etc.), God would not have let that happen to me (or to the person I love)."

- What he's really saying is, I had a deal with God. I kept my side of the bargain, but God didn't.

### 13 **Putting God to the Test**

- The fact is, the Bible takes a dim view of this business of trying to manipulate God. "Do not put the LORD your God to the test" (Deuteronomy 6:16).
- Jesus cites this text when tempted in the wilderness. "Again it is written," Jesus said to his adversary, "'Do not put the Lord your God to the test'" (Matthew 4:7).
- And what is "putting God to the test?"
- It is simply trying to hold Him accountable to promises that He has not made.
- So then, misunderstanding God's will could be a huge problem for us all.

### 14 **Simon the sorcerer**

- According to the book of Acts, Simon the Sorcerer was a very popular magician who was famous throughout the land to both high and low alike.
- In fact, he boasted that he was someone great and many people agreed, saying, "This man is the divine power known as the Great Power." (Acts 8:10 NIV)
- But when he heard the preaching of the Gospel through Philip, he believed and was baptized.

### 15 **Simon the sorcerer**

- However, when the Apostle Peter arrived and Simon saw how the Holy Spirit was given upon the laying of Peter's hands, he sought this ability too.
- In fact, according to the context, he offered Peter money.
- Peter rebuked him by saying, "May your money perish with you, because you thought you could buy the gift of God with money! (Acts 8:20 NIV)

### 16 **Simon the sorcerer**

- Repent of this wickedness and pray to the Lord. Perhaps he will forgive you for having such a thought in your heart. (Acts 8:22 NIV)
- For I see that you are full of bitterness and captive to sin." (Acts 8:23 NIV)
- Then Simon answered, "Pray to the Lord for me so that nothing you have said may happen to me." (Acts 8:24 NIV)

### 17 **Simon's Heart Issue**

- The big problem with Simon was that he had a major heart issue as the Bible says, he was full of bitterness.
- Not having the kind of status any longer of someone who was great, he sought to recover his former position in society by manipulating God with sacrifices (money).

- This is one of the oldest principles of idolatry and paganism and why the Apostle Paul calls this system greed. [See Col. 3:5]
- It is the idea that we can win the god's favor by the multitude of sacrifices or volume of our religious devotion.

## 18 **Israel**

- One of the reasons, why God wanted his people to be separate and keep their distance from their pagan neighbors is so they wouldn't learn their ways.
- Yahweh was different from those pagan deities.
- While the Mosaic Law included all kinds of sacrifices and ceremonial obligations that were mandatory, these weren't the essence of God's good, pleasing, and perfect will.
- In other words, if we want God's favor, we must first submit to His will and His ways—finding out what really meets the conditions of his promises.

## 19 **False Assumptions**

- One of the biggest mistakes we can make is to develop "false assumptions."
- That is expecting something will turn out in one particular way and then it doesn't.
- Kentucky football fans should know all about this dilemma.
- Christians can do the same thing, when we believe God will honor a compromised lifestyle.

## 20 **The Lord's Will**

- For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth) and find out what pleases the Lord. (Eph 5:8–10 NIV)
- Be very careful, then, how you live — not as unwise but as wise, (Eph 5:15 NIV)
- Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is. (Eph 5:17 NIV)

## 21 **God Watches Over His Word**

- According to Jeremiah the prophet, God watches over His word to perform it. [See Jeremiah 1:12]
- It doesn't mean God watches over our assumptions, our hopes, or our dreams.
- This is why we need to read and sincerely study God's word, so that we can live in submission to His will and so be blessed.
- In other words, faith is believing that God rewards those who follow His word.
- When we live to meet the conditions of those promises, our actions show we believe.

## 22 **Follow God's Word**

- The fear of the Lord is pure, enduring forever. The ordinances of the Lord are sure and altogether righteous. (Psa 19:9 NIV)
- They are more precious than gold, than much pure gold; they are sweeter than honey, than honey from the comb. (Psa 19:10 NIV)
- By them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward. (Psa 19:11 NIV) [See also, Acts 4:32ff.]

## 23 Right Sacrifices

- Not all sacrifices or forms of worship are acceptable to the Lord. They have to line up with His will. This is why revelation is so important.
- As it says in Psalms, Offer right sacrifices and trust in the Lord. (Psa 4:5 NIV)
- Again the point of this lesson tonight is that God watches over His word to perform it.
- So if we want to be blessed in this New Year of 2016, we must find out what pleases the Lord and set our hearts to do it even if it causes us to make sacrifices that are difficult.

## 24 The Churches of Galatia

- In the New Testament, we have a letter written by the Apostle Paul to a group of house churches in province of Galatia that he himself had started.
- These churches were initially doing great and the Spirit of God was really moving in their midst.
- But somehow they had turned from being disciples of Jesus Christ to a form of Christianity that had more to do with Rabbinic Judaism and following the Mosaic Law than the teachings of Christ.
- Instead of focusing on love, charity, and true godliness, they centered on circumcision, Sabbaths, and Jewish feasts as the expression of their faith.

## 25 Questions

- Paul then questions the churches, . . .
  - You were running a good race. Who cut in on you and kept you from obeying the truth? (Gal 5:7 NIV)
- The point is this, that following the truth is the single most important thing in our life.
- Without it, we'll never have God's favor and without His favor we can do little.

## 26 Question

- So my question here tonight, who is cutting in on you and keeping you from obeying the truth that is in Christ?
- Or another way to put it, what is keeping you back from being totally blessed of the Lord?
- I don't know about you, but I think I know what the problem is, it's our faith. We don't really believe that God is a rewarder of those who seek Him.

- So we limit our devotion to Him and don't really offer to Him the specific and quality sacrifices that He is looking for which is to surrender ourselves to His good and pleasing will.

## 27 Faith

- However, all of this can be fixed.
- Because faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God. (Rom 10:17 KJV)
- If we make 2016 a year in which we read, study, and apply God's Word to our life, there is no telling what God can do in our lives.
- For Jesus has promised us [John 15] that if we abide in His teachings, He will abide in us and through the sanctifying work of the Spirit will change us from the inside out.
- He has also promised us that when we pray, we will receive—because we obey His commands and do what pleases Him. [See 1John 3:22]

## 28 Summary & Conclusion

- As your Pastor tonight, I want everyone to have a blessed New Year.
- However, being blessed—having God's favor is no accident, it doesn't happen simply because we want it to.
- We have to abide in the truth of God's word and surrender to His will.
- If we do, our lives will be a sacrifice before the throne of God that will not go unnoticed.
- Be blessed of Lord for this New Year, abide in His truth. Do not let the world dictate its values upon you. AMEN