

Echoes from the Mountain: The Sermon on the Mount
Hearing and Doing
Text: Matthew 7:24-28
3-19-17



Reflection questions... [please consider the teaching notes, first, as a basis of your reflections]

“There’s no place to hide from God?”

“What was your immediate response to that statement? Did it sound more threatening or hopeful? What do you think is shaping your response: God, or a faulty image of God?”

“Where is your life currently showing signs of weakness? Areas of compromise? Instead of feverishly attempting to patch cracks, would you be willing to invite God to search below the surface and lead you in a better path?” (Psalm 139:23-24)

James 1:22-25

*Perhaps you might want to dialogue about the challenges associated with being “hearers and not doers”.
“Doers without hearing”.*

How would you respond to this statement: “No one is considered right with God because of their good works, but no one will eventually be proven to be in the right without them”.

“What if obedience was not simply our compulsory reaction toward God, but the voluntary posture we would assume in order that we might actually experience and generate the blessing for which we were created?”

“I write these things so that you may know (confident; without ambiguity; assurance) that you have eternal life...” 1 John 5:13

“Do you think it is true that our confidence is proportionate to the compatibility of your profession of faith (claims) and your demonstration of faith (lifestyle)? In what ways do you see this principle reflected in your own journey of faith?”

Teaching Notes...

You can’t love a God you don’t know.

You’ll never know a God you won’t seek.

You’ll never abandon yourself to a God you don’t trust— a God you don’t know and love.

We never lose the “grasping instinct”.

In the early stages of our development, we watch children begin to reach for things; to grasp things. But, what we don't possess at that stage of our development is the ability to discern; to know what's beneficial and harmful.

So, couple the “grasping instinct” with the unrestrained desire of a disorderly heart (that reaches for the wrong things) and the results are disastrous.

In fact, the genesis of our Story (interestingly it's the first book) creates the framework for this paradoxical condition: we **grasp** for things which we believe to be valuable; that we believe will satisfy us, if not wholly, at least temporarily. Then, as a result of our persistently failed attempts (remember: once God saw how determined we were, he wired everything for frustration), we assume not only the worthlessness of our efforts, but, tragically, our own worthless (“shame”). We **hide**.

We discover that our leaves come in any number of designer shapes. We cover ourselves with our competency. We attempt to hide behind our confident appearance; our bank statement, our social network, our religious practices.

But, there's no place to hide from God!

We become like the children who stand behind the newly planted sapling and conclude that because we can't see God, he can't see us. So, God has to somehow foil our efforts at hiding, not by “calling us out”, but by “inviting us out”. Not, “You know I can see you, right?”, but, “Where are you?”

It is our hiding soul that drives us, fearfully, into the bushes and says that we are unworthy of love, but it is God who whispers, “Then what am I doing here? Why the search?” It's not an interrogation, it's God's invitation to pause and re-think your present posture and circumstances and choose something else... someone else.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus essentially says, “*This is what we would be like--- the kind of humans that we would be and the kind of conditions in which we would function--- if we would refuse to doubt the goodness of God and his good intentions for us, and we would abandon all of the grasping and hiding*”.

Our dilemma, our identity, and the God we desire are all disclosed (embodied) in Jesus.

Dilemma

Jesus is the one who, seemingly, provokes the crisis (lit *'moment of decision'*). In some very real way, every word, every action of Jesus an indictment on all of the ways that we have “fallen short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23); all of the ways that we have failed to respond appropriately to God and, as a result, abused each other and all of creation.

Prior to Jesus, we had no clear way of judging our own inadequacies. But, he serves not only as the child of the Father that we were meant to be, but the one whose very life serves as a “judgment” against all of the evil (chaos; dysfunction) and restores order (Romans 3:26, “*just and justifier... those who come to him*”).

Identity

Jesus also embodies for us the humans that we were always meant to be. He comes to “fulfill” all that God had in mind for us. He loves God wholly (heart, soul, mind, strength) and then portrays how that love is meant to characterize and transform all of our relationships by loving others as his loved himself.

God

Jesus puts a name and a face to God. “Father”: it’s not simply a means of addressing God, but our posture toward him. Jesus so beautifully portrays for us a God who is both “sovereign” and “gracious”. Who can do anything he pleases and, according to Paul, God decided to bring us to himself and make us part of his family through Jesus... *“that’s what he wanted to do and it gave him great pleasure”* (Ephesians 1:5).

I think what caught my attention this time through was the response of the crowd [verses 28-29].

“authority”- providing meaningful grounds for action.

Psalms 119 is a classic expression of one who doesn’t simply “love God’s laws”, but who “loves God”, therefore, “loves what God has to say”.

“I will delight in your decrees and not forget your word” (16).

“How I delight in your commands. How I love them!” (47)

He doesn’t say, “I clearly hear your list of demands and I am inclined toward compliance!” He says, rather, *“You are good and you do only good; teach me your decrees (68). Your laws are wonderful. No wonder I obey them!”* (129)

There is an authority within this framework, but authority is swallowed up in love.

Salvation is not to be understood as something that happened to us, but something that is happening in and through us.

It is not an ethereal encounter, but the wholeness that one experiences as a result of placing their confidence (trust) in Jesus as “the way” and a willful determination to follow in “the ways of Jesus” in order to experience the life for which we were created.

James says, *“You can’t audit the Christian life”* (1:22-25) You can’t sit in on the teachings. Jesus never suggested that we were somehow better off for having been exposed to his teachings.

Doing without hearing is incredibly self-indulgent. It is seeing ourselves as our own point of reference. It is the conviction that the resources necessary for the ‘good life’ are available to us, independent of God.

Hearing without doing is incredibly self-deceptive. If we were to “hear it”, without “doing it” (rightly responding), John says it would actually create even more desperate circumstances for us: remaining in darkness in the possibility of light (John 1).

Your faith does not really consist of the things you profess to believe, but the lifestyle that your faith produces.

Granted, there is no shortage of religious expression which is demanding and ‘grace-less’, but there is also no shortage of religious expression that is hollow and deceptive--- not expecting truth, therefore, not experiencing truth.

Quite frankly, a gospel that can offer me some form of “amnesty”, but can’t re-direct my desires and alter the course of my life cannot be “good news”, at all.

The **foundations** of our lives are typically only exposed when they experience some form of testing/pressure. Our lives rarely come “crashing down”, all at once, although such can seem the case to others.

When the reality of God’s love for you finally gets your attention, arouses your imagination, and captures your heart, sin will lose its power over you. You’d be willing to follow Jesus anywhere!

What always “moves” God is his love for us, not our love for him. *“This is love: not...”* (1 John 4:10). “We have come to know and rely upon the love God has for us...” (4:16).