

INTENTIONALLY FAITHFUL

Revelation 3:15-22

Intro

Now I recognize that some of you will see that we are hearing from Revelation and are wondering, 'so where is the guy who stands behind the pulpit headed here? Revelation is a tough read.'

I agree with you. The language and, I believe, the original intent behind why these verses were put together are so coded, and the history of these various communities so clouded by the amount of time separating ourselves from their particular days, that it is impossible to know, really know everything that John was actually trying to say.

That being said, these words are still God-breathed and they are able to reflect truth toward all those who are willing to look.

Here's how to hear these words: they are declarations from God spoken through the Apostle John to one particular community of faith. Therefore, there are portions of the passage that will not pertain to us...but that doesn't mean that we aren't able to see some of our realities. Here's how I would like us to think about these verses: our faith needs to be intentional. Otherwise we will miss (at least) some of the ways that God is whispering into our lives. The scripture reads this way.

Revelation 3:15-22

¹⁵ 'I know your works; you are neither cold nor hot. I wish that you were either cold or hot. ¹⁶So, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I am about to spit you out of my mouth. ¹⁷For you say, "I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing." You do not realize that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked. ¹⁸Therefore I counsel you to buy from me gold refined by fire so that you may be rich; and white robes to clothe you and to keep the shame of your nakedness from being seen; and salve to anoint your eyes so that you may see. ¹⁹I reprove and discipline those whom I love. Be earnest, therefore, and repent. ²⁰Listen! I am standing at the door, knocking; if you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to you and eat with you, and you with me. ²¹To the one who conquers I will give a place with me on my throne, just as I myself conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne. ²²Let anyone who has an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches.'

Hebrews 10:11-25

Intro

The intentionality that I wanted us to start thinking about prior to the reading from Revelation is taken to a much broader level in our reading from Hebrews. It is here that the intentionality of faith not only makes an impression on an individual's life, but on others lives as well and that initial individual is intentional in the intensity of their faith (and yes, I did think about how to say that for quite a few minutes). This gift of faith is meant to be lived out...intentionally. The scripture reads this way.

Hebrews 10:11-25

¹¹ And every priest stands day after day at his service, offering again and again the same sacrifices that can never take away sins. ¹²But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for

sins, 'he sat down at the right hand of God', ¹³and since then has been waiting 'until his enemies would be made a footstool for his feet.' ¹⁴For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are sanctified. ¹⁵And the Holy Spirit also testifies to us, for after saying, ¹⁶'This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, says the Lord: I will put my laws in their hearts, and I will write them on their minds', ¹⁷he also adds, 'I will remember their sins and their lawless deeds no more.' ¹⁸Where there is forgiveness of these, there is no longer any offering for sin.

19 Therefore, my friends, since we have confidence to enter the sanctuary by the blood of Jesus, ²⁰by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain (that is, through his flesh), ²¹and since we have a great priest over the house of God, ²²let us approach with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. ²³Let us hold fast to the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who has promised is faithful. ²⁴And let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds, ²⁵not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

'Intentionally Faithful'

Anyone who has had a conversation with my youngest son Austin knows that he loves to watch movies. He does not like to watch movies: he loves to watch movies. If you ask what his favorite movie is, the answer will vacillate from something that he watched yesterday to a movie that has yet to come out to a movie that he has seen countless numbers of times. It feels like the answer is different every time.

But that doesn't mean that there aren't a few that he keeps going back to time after time after time after time.

So, it's quiz time! Remember the show 'Name That Tune'? Well, this is 'Name that Movie'. I will give you a famous line from the movie and you will...Name...That...Movie!

Are you ready? Well it doesn't matter if you're ready because it's happening anyway. Listen closely. Here's the line.

'I want it and I want it now!'

Well, it's kind of a trick question because it shows up in a couple of places: the 1971 classic 'Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory', and the 2005 cult classic 'Charlie and the Chocolate Factory'. In both cases it's said by the character Verruca Salt. In the first case she wants a goose who lays golden eggs. In the latter, she wants a squirrel who is able to deshell nuts.

And yes, Austin has watched both of these films so many times that he is able to deliver every line half a second prior to the line actually being said.

The reason that I bring this up (what, did you really think that we were going to take the whole time playing 'Name that Movie'? No, you've got to come back next week to play again!), is because even all the way back in 1971 there was an understanding that many people in the culture were longing more and more for instant gratification. They wanted it...and they wanted it now.

1971!

Do you think it's better or worse in today's culture?

Exactly! Not only has the sentiment remained and become ever more engrained, technology has developed to the point that if we don't get what we want right now, we think that our rights are being infringed upon (internet as a basic human right anyone? And yes, that's a line of thought that actually exists. Google it. Did you pick up the irony that I just put down?).

So we live in a culture that only continues to feed the mentality that we should continue to get whatever we want at faster and faster rates...which stands in direct opposition to what we hear in our passages: that our faith needs to be intentional even when it feels like it's a waste of time.

And what I am specifically referring to is the sentiment that we hear in Hebrews that we should continue to meet, even though there are some who feel it really isn't worth it anymore. What that is are people who are saying to themselves (and others), 'look, I don't need the community of faith to connect with God: I can do it on my own.'

Now, part of that I agree with, because we are able to connect with God individually.

But what is being neglected is that the individual connection with God leads to a communal connection with other people who are also led to say, 'I believe'. This is an intentional step that needs to be taken again and again and again and again because it is so easy to look around at the world and put your hands up and say, 'I don't want to have to put up with it: I'm better on my own! That's the way I want it and I want it now!'

But our faith needs to be intentional. God will be consistent and persistent in reminding us of that fact (aka: will keep knocking on the door of our consciousness), but if we don't intentional open the door to that knocking, then we will end up becoming one of those people who may be religious but aren't faithful...and God wants us to be faithful and that takes place through intentional action and not accidental occurrence.

Is your faith intentional? And yes, I'm talking about so much more than just showing up at church on this or any other Sunday morning.

Is your faith intentional?

When you think about how you love God, are you intentional about it? Or do you 'get to it' when the things that you want are addressed?

When you think about how you love your neighbors, are you intentional about it? Or do you 'deal with that' if and only if your neighbor is nice to you first?

Do you hear the difference?

Do you feel the intentionality that needs to be applied?

As we gather here on the other side of a baptism, we are able to recognize that each of us have responsibilities to Evelyn. Promises were made, not just by Adam and Cathy but by each of us as members of this community of faith. Each of needs to be intentional in following through on keeping

those promises, otherwise our attention will be grabbed by this, that, and the other thing and draw us to the things that we want (and we want them now!).

We need to be intentional.

Now some science.

When I was doing my research for today's sermon, I came across an article that talked about the rule of thumb that it takes 21 days to form a new habit. That idea was actually created by a plastic surgeon who published a book in 1961 that spoke to his observations that it took a minimum of 21 days for he and his patients to adapt to a new way of acting. There was not experimentation. They were observations. Over the decades that ended up becoming 'it takes 21 days to form a new habit'.

Well it turns out, that's not true.

Phillippa Lally is a health psychology researcher at University College London. In a study published in the *European Journal of Social Psychology*, Lally and her research team decided to figure out just how long it actually takes to form a habit. After studying 96 people over a 12 week period, they determined that, on average, it takes more than 2 months before a new behavior becomes automatic — 66 days to be exact. And how long it takes a new habit to form can vary widely depending on the behavior, the person, and the circumstances. In Lally's study, it took anywhere from 18 days to 254 days for people to form a new habit.

How does that relate to our conversation on faith?

Well, our desire to 'want it and want it now' leaves many of us feeling like we have failed in regard to following God because we aren't, from our perspective (aka: the world's perspective) doing it well, let alone doing it right (whatever that means!). And when we start bumping into that feeling, many of us, start to give up, or fall into doing the religious things that we do seem to be able to do right (I've read the Bible, prayed, or went to church today...so I'm good!).

But that isn't the faithfulness that God is imploring us to take part in, and the fact that we have a snapshot of how long it takes us to develop new habits (on average 66 days) shows us that we need to be intentional for what may feel like the long haul.

Faithfulness (loving God and neighbor) is something that needs to be engaged in on a breath by breath basis and yes, it will take a while before it feels anything like natural...and it's worth it! Both for yourself and for the world around you, it's worth it! It may not be what you want...but it is what you need...it is what the world needs in order for the will of God and the presence of God to be felt.

We need to be intentional.

Are you?

Are you intentional in your faithfulness?

We need to be. All of us need to be...and over the next few weeks we'll unpack what that may mean for us.

In the meantime, don't give up hope. Just because you do not feel that you are hitting the mark in terms of faithfulness, does not mean that you are not on the path. Continue to be intentional. Love God. Love neighbor. Love yourself. Be intentionally faithful.

After Sermon Prayer

Holy God, it takes time to establish new ways of living and we recognize that time is not something that we are comfortable spending...especially if there's a lot of it that needs to be spent. Lord, grant us Your patience and peace so that we might be intentional in our faithfulness, being willing to follow You, even when it is not what we want. Lord, with You all things are possible. Let it be so. Amen.