

REDISCOVER JESUS: WORKING OUT THE BLIND SPOTS

Matthew 5:1-12

Intro

Our conversation this morning is not about the Beatitudes.

However, the Beatitudes are able to exemplify the point that we need to accept and internalize: our ways are not God's ways.

It sounds simple enough, but do we really open ourselves up to that reality?

Or do we instead, nod our heads in agreement; all the while looking for a way to fix whatever we may see as screwed up? Utilizing whatever means of the world that we have at our disposal?

Hear these very familiar words and ask yourself: whose ways are your default ways? The scripture reads this way.

Matthew 5:1-12

5When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. ²Then he began to speak, and taught them, saying:

3 'Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

4 'Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

5 'Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

6 'Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

7 'Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.

8 'Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

9 'Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

10 'Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

11 'Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. ¹²Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Matthew 7:1-5

Intro

As we start to think about the different ways that are at our disposal (aka: God's ways and the ways of humanity) we quickly start to realize that there are more than a few areas of our life that we simply are unable to see as they really are or, at the very least, are unable to appreciate the context of what is before us, because how we see the world, how we see our lives, either isn't the whole picture, or is shaded in such a way that what we behold goes through a filter, and that filter skews everything.

What we are about to hear tends to be a passage that we think explicitly speaks to the issue of forgiveness.

But, like our first passage was not an opportunity to speak about the Beatitudes, but an invitation to recognize the difference between God's ways and the ways of humanity, our second passage will be use the issue of forgiveness to talk about our skewed perspective. We all have it. We do. And if you think that you don't, that speaks to how large your blind spot is. Hear these words and as you do I invite you to begin to prayerfully consider the blind spots that you possess, because your perspective is more of you and the ways of the world as opposed to God. The scripture reads this way.

Matthew 7:1-5

⁷Do not judge, so that you may not be judged. ²For with the judgement you make you will be judged, and the measure you give will be the measure you get. ³Why do you see the speck in your neighbor's eye, but do not notice the log in your own eye? ⁴Or how can you say to your neighbor, "Let me take the speck out of your eye", while the log is in your own eye? ⁵You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your neighbor's eye.

Matthew 5:14-16

Intro

Why does any of this matter? Because of who we actually are. God's ways are not our ways.

But they need to be. More and more they need to be so that God is able to limit the blind spots that we have, so that we might be able to truly and more fully pick up the cross that the Son of Man has reminded was before us all along. Hear these words. This is who you are. This is who I am. This is who we are as members on the Way. The scripture reads this way.

Matthew 5:14-16

¹⁴ 'You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hidden. ¹⁵No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. ¹⁶In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.

'Rediscover Jesus: Working Out the Blind Spots'

On Wednesday morning, with the reality that we were just reminded of ('you are the light of the world') I conducted a highly unscientific experiment. Into my Google search bar I typed the word, 'Christians'. I just wanted to see what news stories would ping up. Here's what I saw.

'U.K. Denies Asylum to Iranian Christian, Says Christianity Isn't a 'Peaceful' Religion'.

'Christians Like Us: tense talks in this Big Brother house straining for heaven - Ten Christians argue about homophobia, sexism and child abuse – with relevance for believers and perhaps atheists, too'.

'When Christians Generalize And Marginalize Atheists'.

Those were three of the top five headlines. The other two headlines spoke to the percentage of the world's population that are considered Christian and Muslim respectively, and how Christians in Australia feel betrayed by their federal government because of the cutting of financial support to existing aid programs in southeast Asia.

Christianity isn't peaceful; Christians argue; Christians generalize and marginalize.

Again, this is unscientific and the contexts of the stories are not there.

Think about those sentiments and place it alongside of Matthew 5:14: 'you are the light of the world'.

See any difference?

How's that difference make you feel?

I have no problem admitting that I looked at those headlines (Christianity isn't peaceful; Christians argue; Christians generalize and marginalize) and I felt awful...and I wasn't surprised, because people of faith are viewed in a negative light in the midst of the world...and there have been an incredibly impressive number of times when 'people of faith' have shined a light into the world that is anything of God.

We've talked about the Reformed Church in America and you know that our denomination has done a good job of contributing to this reality (the reason we need the 2020 Vision Group, anyone?).

We are the light of the world...and there are too many days in too many ways when what shines from us either isn't of God, or is dimmed either because as much as we know we shouldn't, a basket has been placed over the light (we don't want to come off as 'offensive' in our secular world), or we weren't all the bright to begin with (because we were focused on the maintaining 'the church', instead of sharing the message of Christ).

Maybe this is overly simplistic...it probably is.

But as much as I think and pray about it, the more it feels like there is an unfortunate amount of truth even in my over simplification.

Why?

Because our ways, too often, are anything but God's ways and in that reality, we have allowed our blind spots to become calcified, thereby allowing God's ways to be so blanketed in the ways of humanity, that the world struggles to even know what God's ways even are anymore.

Silly example: I was driving southbound on the New York State Thruway a few weeks ago. On the back of a semi was a question: 'have you prayed today?' Nothing wrong with that...until you take into account the illustration that was above it, depicting a man, with an angry face, pointing at you.

The person who owns that truck thought that was of God! It isn't. It so isn't.

And yet how many people not only think it is, but will fight you when you question it (think about that for a second, especially in light of the Beatitudes)?

We've all got blind spots.

And while our blind spots might not be as illustratable as the pointing finger on the back of a semi-truck, they do the exact same thing of reflecting the ways of humanity instead of the light of God...and it is because of that fact that the world looks at the church and sees another group of people who are looking out for themselves, instead of allowing God's light to shine through God's ways being championed.

Too much?

Here's my response: even if it is, it is still our responsibility to make sure that what shines from us reflects the light of God. We have to be utterly intentional because when we are not, then the inverse (and we are living in and are, in some ways, are responsible for, the consequences thereof) the inverse becomes so.

So let me ask you: last we talked about a steps to begin to be embraced by an upside down transformation from and through Jesus (as opposed to the tweaking that most of us are actually comfortable with). What were the three steps that we talked about?

Reading of the Scriptures of a daily basis; entering into a regular prayer life, the denial of self.

How are you doing with that?

And as I said last week, that isn't said from a place of judgement.

But especially as we talk about the light that we are shining (or as the case may be, not shining), we have to circle back and talk about the upside down transformation that Jesus is looking to implement in and through us, because if it isn't happening...then something else is, and that something else is of man, and that something that is of humanity is what is reflecting out into the world, and the headlines that I unscientifically saw, become what feels like, the unfortunate norm.

We need to take off the blinders passed out by humanity, remove the prisms of the world that we wear and think of as truth, and put down the lies we tell ourselves, and remember who the Son of Man sees us to be: the light of the world.

I totally get that I am so coming off as a preacher right now. I do.

But this conversation is not about me or anyone else guilt-ing you into anything.

It's about looking at the truth that God has been putting out into the world since the foundation of the world, and acknowledging that we have not been near as faithful as we have thought ourselves to be.

We are the light of the world, and we can actually reflect the light that is of God...when we are willing to knock on the door of Jesus-led upside down transformation.

Or we can say that we're 'not that bad', that it's 'too hard', or that you'll 'get to it...eventually'. Blind spots anyone?

Jesus says today is the day. Knock on the door of transformation and as you do you will be able to begin to recognize (and therefore acknowledge) the blind spots that you have, which allows us to become who we were created to be: the light of the world.

Knock on that door. Please. Knock on that door today.

After Sermon Prayer

Holy and gracious God, Your ways are not our ways, and that is why we need to recognize the blind spots that we have in our lives and fall before You, truly opening ourselves to the upside down transformation that You are inviting us to be embraced by. Lord, hear our prayers, and free us from our doubts and fears, welcoming us to new patterns of faithful living that allow Your light to shine forth out into the world, because our ways are becoming that much closer to being your ways. God, please, let it be so...today. Please. It is in Jesus' name that we pray. Amen.