

10-26-25

It's Personal

Mark 10: 17 – 21

In the past, I tried to establish the fact that in order to worship and serve God whole-heartedly and unreservedly, a major paradigm shift must occur in our lives. Have you ever come across the bumper sticker that read ... God is my copilot? Simply put, this is terribly wrong. We must reject the idea that to be a follower of God we simply invite God to join us on our life's journey. No! God doesn't join us; we join him. Our mindset needs to be that God calls us to follow **Him**. It's on **His** terms that we follow Him, not ours.

For many of us, this is too radical of a shift for us to handle. The idea of relinquishing control of our lives to someone else is just too unsettling. We don't like the feeling of being out of control. It's like that uneasy feeling we get when we're driving along and hit a patch of ice. We're tapping the brakes and turning the wheel, but the car's not responding.

When we think about it, this makes perfect sense. Why in the world would anyone want to hand over the reins to someone whom we know very little?

In our western culture, we are taught at a very early age that the future is what we make of it – that destiny lies in our hands, not someone else's.

This, I believe is a major hurdle that Christians struggle to overcome. Church is supposed to be made up of God's children who know, love, and worship God on an intimate and personal level, but many of us don't know him this way, so we find ourselves in a continual tug of war with God.

We want to love and serve God, but our trust and faith in him is weak because we don't know him as we ought, so we pull back from him, play hide and seek with him, and sometimes cutoff all communication with him.

This often leads to confusion, frustration, and disillusionment.

Why?

Because when our relationship with God is strained; when it is fractured or non-existent, the connection and communication between the two parties becomes disrupted as well. In most cases, I would describe it as shaky at best – sort of like the reception on my TV when I only had the rabbit ears for an antenna!

Usually, the precipitator of all this angst is that at some point we decided that God didn't behave as he should have. It's like we have all these expectations of God when we became Christians, but when he acts in unexpected ways, we naturally assume that we're the ones that have been mistreated.

When what it really boils down to is that we've placed unrealistic expectations on God, which on the surface, sounds almost comical, because when we think about, if anyone should be able to meet our expectations, it should be God!

But the problem isn't with God, it's with us!

God cannot be anyone but himself.

He cannot be unfaithful or untrue to his character or he would cease being God. So if God doesn't meet our expectations, maybe it's because we've failed to know God's true nature!

I always chuckle to myself when I hear a celebrity or famous person make a public apology, because they generally say the same thing: "I am not the person who did this terrible thing." I laugh because they are not saying that some other person is responsible. They're just attempting to divorce their actions from their own person. Unfortunately, their argument is paper-thin and reveals the sad fact that they've never read their Bible.

In Matthew 15, Jesus clearly teaches that our actions expose our true identity: *"Don't you see that whatever enters the mouth goes into the stomach and out of the body? But the things that come out of the mouth come from the heart (ie. From our true selves), and these make a man unclean. From out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander. These are what make a man unclean."*

Who we are and how we act are inextricably linked.

So the key point I want to put forward this morning for your consideration is that If our church wants to be a worshipful church - which I believe He wants us to be, then it is imperative that we commit ourselves to knowing God's true nature/character. We will then be in a better position to worship him as He truly deserves.

But the question remains ...

How will we know when we are worshipping God properly?

To be honest, the answer is quite simple: We will know we are worshipping God properly when the fruits of our worship become evident in our church community. In other words, our worship will manifest itself in how we treat God and how we treat each other.

Or to put it another way: His divine nature will be reflected in us and experienced by us when we are worshipping Him as we ought.

Here's how Paul puts it in 2 Corinthians 3: 17 – 18: *"Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we, with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit."*

Can we even begin to grasp the implication of what Paul is saying here?

Once we finally accept and embrace the paradigm shift that God is the owner, operator, and captain of the ship and that we are at most, the first mate, we are then free to become everything God wants us to be – and the foundation of our new identity becomes God's undeniable glory shining through us!

Isn't this totally amazing and awe-inspiring?

That God wants to share his good, holy, and perfect nature with us – and that this sharing of his nature with us actually transformed us into his likeness? We go from being a child of evil to a lover of the good simply because Christ lives in us!

Wow! Talk about mind-blowing!

This is the power of Christ's resurrection!

When Christ arose from the grave., he not only conquered sin and death for us, the Bible also says that He secured the right for us to become children of God! He secured the right for us to have our nature completely changed! We were once slaves of the darkness. Now we are children of the light!

It's like the flip-side of the same coin. On the one side of the coin it says, "Sin and death conquered" On the other side we read, "The right to become children of the living God."

John says it so wonderfully in 1 John 3:1 and following: *"How great is the love the Father has lavished on us that we should become the children of God! And that is what we are ... Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him as he is. Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure."*

Of course! It makes total sense now!

At the very core of who we are – at the very center of our being -our soul - we are now holy and pure because God's life dwells here, and the process of transformation will slowly but surely, and overwhelmingly spread purity and goodness through us until we are, as Paul writes in Ephesians 4:13, *"mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ."*

Now I don't know about you, but I'm sure my body isn't up to containing *"the whole measure of the fullness of Christ."*

But Paul tells us that's okay, because his exhortation is not directed to us individually, as much as it is directed to us as a corporate body of believers.

The preceding verse, Ephesians 4:12 reminds us that God gives gifts *"to prepare **God's people** for works of service **so that the body of Christ may be built up...***" The point being - and we definitely do not want to miss it - is that in a practical way, we are responsible for our neighbor's spiritual maturity!

We're in this together, this pursuit of unity, maturity, and fullness of Christ! We can't do it alone. We are to help one another grow, and as we do, God's glory shines all the brighter amongst us and God's name becomes famous among the nations.

So I whole-heartedly agree with Francis Schaeffer, the great Christian thinker of the twentieth century when we wrote, "Christianity is individual, but it's not individualistic."

In other words, we, as individuals, do have to work out our salvation in fear and trembling, but we can never forget that the end goal is so much bigger than what we first realized.

Paul specifies this goal in Ephesians 1 when he writes, *"And he [the heavenly father] made known the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure which he purposed in Christ to put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfillment – **to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ.**"*

Did you hear that? God's purpose is to bring all things in heaven and on earth under the headship of one person, namely Jesus Christ!

To put it another way, all of human history is pointing toward and marching to the zenith which is none other than the person of Jesus Christ and his rightful ascension to the throne as Lord of All.

And we, as his children, get a front row seat not only to observe, but to play an integral role in the working out of his perfect and divine plan – a plan that I would describe as both personal and priestly.

Personal in the sense that God calls each of us by name to enter into a holy and loving relationship with Him.

Priestly, because once our relationship with God is restored, we are then to be about our heavenly father's work just as Jesus taught his disciples in John 9:4: *"As long as it is day, we must do the work of him who sent me."*

And this work is none other than being his representatives to a world who has lost its way home.

I want to spend the rest of our time together focusing on these two new aspects, the personal and the priestly nature of the church, because I believe that together they form God's vision for this church.

Let us examine then, what it means to be a personal church:

1. God calls us to be a personal church because the God we know and serve is personal. God thinks, acts, and feels. He's not an impersonal force, nor an all-inclusive everything. When he speaks to us, He says "I" and we answer him saying "you and yours.". I'm so happy that God revealed himself through his son, Jesus. Hebrews 1:3 says, *"The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being."* Without the person of Jesus, my attempt to know God on a personal level would have been in vain.
2. God calls us to be a personal church because God, who is personal, individually calls us to himself.

One of the marvelous things about the Bible is that it names real people who really existed! It's not just a book about rules or precepts or theological ideas.

It's about real people who encountered God and how they responded to His call on their lives. I don't know how many times I've tried to imagine what it must have been like to be one of Jesus' first disciples. What would it have been like to be a fisherman standing on the shore of the Sea of Galilee and hear Jesus call my name.

Would I have dropped everything and followed him or would I have hesitated and possibly pretended I didn't hear him and continued to clean my nets?

I don't know, but I'm so happy that I have these men's examples that inspire and challenge me and cause me to ask, important questions like, "How can I be a better follower of Christ?"

3. God calls us to be a personal church because those who are still seeking Him are loved by a personal God. This point is the whole reason I read Mark 10: 17 – 21 in the first place. Do remember Jesus' response after the rich young man declared he had kept all of God's commandments? Mark records, *"Jesus looked at Him and loved him."*

Did the rich young man do what Jesus called him to do? Apparently not at that time.

Does that mean Jesus loved him less when the young man walked away?

We all know the answer to this.

How about this church? Will we only love those who receive our message, or will we continue to love those who reject the Gospel? Not everyone is God's children.

You can only become a child of God by faith in Christ, but everyone is made in God's image and deserves our respect, kindness, and love.

A personal church will shine forth a personal God's love no matter their response.

Now what about the priestly church?

Here are three quick thoughts and some verses to whet your appetite.

1. God calls us to be a priestly church because humanity's greatest need, payment for our sins, was met in the person of Jesus Christ when he offered himself on the cross. Thus becoming our Great High Priest. Hebrews 7:26: *"Such a high priest meets our need – one who is holy, blameless and pure, set apart from sinners, exalted above the heavens ... He sacrificed for their sins once for all when he offered himself."*

As a priestly church this truth can never be altered. If for some reason, another option of salvation is ever preached or promoted, then its leaders will be in danger of losing their very souls. Paul writes even stronger words to the church of Galatia: *"If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let him be eternally condemned."*

2. God calls us to be a priestly church because our Great High Priest is the head of the church. Ephesians 5:23: *"Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior."* In other words, when our leader talks, we are to listen and obey.

And this is what our Great High Priest says to His church through Peter:
"You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light."

3. God calls us to be a priestly church because our ministry will help many others see the light.

God calls us to be a personal church because he is a personal God.

God call us to be a personal church because he calls us to be in a personal relationship with him.

God calls us to be a personal church to others, even when they chose to reject the Gospel, because He still loves even when we are unable to reciprocate.

Priestly church:

God calls us to be a priestly church because he became our high priest.

God calls us to be a priestly church because as High priest he is the head of the church.

God calls us to be a priestly church because many others still walk in darkness, and we now have the light that is the life of men.

Being the church means we are to be personal and priestly.

Help us Lord, follow your example and live up to your high and holy calling.

Thank you, that you are a loving and forgiving God and that you'll show us the way and give us the strength to follow you. Amen.