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CEDARCREEKCHURCH

Four Ways We Miss Jesus

Monday, March 27, 2017

Have you ever drunk or eaten something unexpected? Maybe you're a Diet Pepsi fan, and your server brings you a regular Pepsi. When you taste it, you contort your face and act as if you've just ingested something inedible. Perhaps you've accidentally tasted spoiled milk - which is an awful experience - and milk is forever a dangerous game. A few months ago, I was making breakfast - a bacon and egg omelet - before work, but I didn't have the time to cook the bacon, so I decided to use bacon bits from our pantry. Omelets can be hard to make, and this one was perfect. It had to be, as I had used my last three eggs. I was at the right spot to add the bacon, so I grabbed the package of bacon bits and dumped it in. That's when I saw it... the worst possible thing you can see covering your bacon. It was a thick green growth rendering the bacon and eggs inedible. I had no clue that when I opened the package of the delicious-looking bacon bits and dumped the contents into my beautifully crafted omelet that I'd be ruining my morning. I was so excited for the omelet that seeing the outside of the package of bacon bits was enough for me to dump the contents into my omelet.

Silly moldy bacon omelet stories aside, this problem is prevalent in much of our lives. We focus so much on outside appearances that we totally miss the most important part.

This past weekend, Whitehouse Campus Pastor Luke Shortridge spoke about Mark's account of the rich young ruler. By taking a close look at the one-on-one interaction between Jesus and this young man, we can gain some insight into our spiritual life.

Mark 10:17-22

¹⁷As Jesus was starting out on his way to Jerusalem, a man came running up to him, knelt down, and asked, "Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?"

¹⁸"Why do you call me good?" Jesus asked. "Only God is truly good. ¹⁹But, to answer your question, you know the commandments: 'You must not murder. You must not commit adultery. You must not steal. You must not testify falsely. You must not cheat anyone. Honor your father and mother.'"

²⁰"Teacher," the man replied, "I've obeyed all these commandments since I was young."

²¹Looking at the man, Jesus felt genuine love for him. "There is still one thing you haven't done," he told him. "Go and sell all your possessions and give the

money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me."

²²At this the man's face fell, and he went away sad, for he had many possessions.

This story shows us that we can miss Jesus in four different ways.

We misunderstand *true* goodness

According to a [2003 study by the Barna group](#), "just one half of 1% expect to go to hell upon their death [while] 64% believe they will go to heaven... (5%) believe they will be reincarnated, and (5%) believe they will cease to exist... [and] (24%) admitted that they have 'no idea' what will happen after they die." The problem here is that most people, just like the rich young ruler, have no idea what true goodness is. Even if they have a semi-clear picture of what goodness is (they might point to the Ten Commandments) they haven't seriously considered how their life falls drastically short of this standard and thus assume they are "safe."

We mistakenly focus on religion

When confronted with their severe shortcomings, many people think they have to try harder. *"If I could just [insert good deed] more, I'd be good enough."* Like the rich young ruler, they think their attempts at being more religious will help them to take care of their sins. They might try attending church more, praying more, reading more, and on and on, all the while missing **Jesus** altogether (John 17:3). These attempts at religiosity, on the outside, look sincere and make those around them think, *"This person has their life together and is close to God,"* when in reality, that person knows they're putting on a show.

We misplace our significance

By trying harder, or trying to find the one thing we must do to earn God's favor, we drastically misplace the source of our significance. The rich young ruler assumed that if he could find one more good thing to do, he could earn God's favor and thus earn eternal life.

This is not the gospel.

The gospel tells us that our significance must not come from our actions - because those produce death (Romans 6:23) - rather, it must come from

Christ and his adopting us as his sons and daughters (Ephesians 1:5) and that **this** brings God great pleasure.

This, however, isn't the only way we misplace our significance. The rich young ruler found significance in his moral standing and his wealth. Some of us might relate, but others of us might find our significance in our job (current or dream job), our spouse, and more. As Tim Keller points out, Jesus, in telling the rich young ruler to give up all his money says, *"I want the thing you think will give you power and joy without me."*

What is that for you? For Luke, it was his son, and for many of us, that would seem ridiculous. However, the reason we don't understand what God is asking of us is because we miss **his** sacrifice.

We miss his sacrifice

Let's briefly examine Jesus' responses to the rich young ruler. Instantly, knowing the man's heart, he points the young man to the Ten Commandments, as the standard of righteousness. However, he skips over commandments 1-4, which deal with our relationship with God, and points to commandments 5-9, which deal with our relationships with others. This was intentional; he knew that this man had treated others well. He was great at appearing righteous to those around him. However, his relationship with God was severely lacking. Jesus, instead of asking him about commandments 1-4, drives right into the man's heart. He tells him to give up everything. This man probably thought he was living out at least the first two commandments well. Jesus, however, knew that the man's heart was not turned over to God; it was tied into his money.

Tim Keller says that "the gospel always demands more than you thought, and offers far more than you could've imagined." The death and resurrection of Jesus prove this. Jesus, who didn't have to, gave up **everything** to save you from your sin. He gave up the comforts of his heavenly place to live and die as a man so that you could be healed of the burden of your sin and enter into a genuine relationship with God. When we, like the rich young ruler, attempt to insert our efforts in place of Jesus - when we think we have to be better to earn God's mercy - we miss Jesus' sacrifice and miss out on a right relationship with him.

What about you?

If you were in the place of the rich young ruler, what would Jesus ask you to give up?

How do you think you'd respond?

What might Jesus be asking you to surrender to him today?

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, thank you for your word. Thank you for this story of the rich young ruler. I invite you to speak directly to my heart because I want to have a deeper, more intimate relationship with you. Thank you for your mercy and your blessings. I ask all of this in Jesus' name. Amen.

****Today's post jumped ahead in the reading plan to Mark 10. If you're following along with the reading plan. Today's reading is Mark 5.****

You Can't Do This Alone

Tuesday, March 28, 2017

In today's world, we applaud leaders. Followers get referred to as "sheep" almost always with a negative tone. We think of sheep as those who can't think for themselves and who mindlessly cling to a charismatic person and acquire their ideas. Because of this mindset, we like to think we can get by on our own: no need for a "shepherd." We don't dare be called a sheep. But Jesus knows we need shepherding.

Mark 6:32-34 states, *"³²So they left by boat for a quiet place, where they could be alone. ³³But many people recognized them and saw them leaving, and people from many towns ran ahead along the shore and got there ahead of them. ³⁴Jesus saw the huge crowd as he stepped from the boat, and had compassion on them because they were like sheep without a shepherd. So he began teaching them many things."*

Here Jesus was with his apostles, looking for a quiet place to rest. They had been so busy teaching people and serving; they hardly had time to eat. This rest was needed and well-deserved. And yet, when Jesus saw many people rushing to seek him, he didn't turn them away or get upset. He recognized that they had a desperate need for a leader: someone to teach them and save them. In the verses following this, Jesus feeds 5,000 men and their families. Talk about a change of plans from a quiet rest with his close friends to a massive gathering! Think of the lives changed that day! Jesus is the ultimate shepherd. He leads us in our faith and our doctrine. As essential as he is, we also benefit from spiritual mentors here on earth.

Many Christians do not have someone in their life whom they trust to lead them spiritually. Spiritual mentors can help answer the questions/doubts you have, or possibly guide you on where to find answers. If you allow them, they will help hold you accountable when they see you falling off track. They can be present and act as a listening ear when you have a problem. Even if you are typically the one in the leader role, humbly accept that you may need someone to lead you, too.

When considering a mentor, it isn't a mindless, "close your eyes and pick the person toward which your finger points" choice. It takes discernment, trust, and a degree of vulnerability. Someone who becomes a mentor is likely someone with whom you've already established a relationship. This allows you to know if they are trustworthy and if their ideals line up biblically. They

may be a friend, family member, pastor, LifeGroup leader, coworker, fellow church member, and so on. Keep in mind that once we establish this relationship, it is still important to be ready to discern whether their advice is biblical. We are all human and learning as we journey with Christ!

Is there someone in your life whom you regularly seek for spiritual wisdom? Does this person have permission to “set you straight”?

With this said, being a spiritual mentor has value, too! Mentoring someone has obvious potential benefits for them, but it also can help you grow in your relationship with God. It can help you recognize places where you need growth, and it can give you an awareness of your strengths.

Do you shepherd anyone?

Where have you seen growth in this person?

Have you grown because of this role?

Who shepherds you?

PRAYER

God, help me to recognize my need for a shepherd. Please help me to allow someone to enter my life who will be a spiritual mentor and help guide me towards a better relationship with you. If it is your will to have me shepherd someone specific, please give me strength and wisdom to lead them the way you want. Thank you for the Holy Spirit that guides me and for Jesus who saved me! Amen.

How's Your Prayer Life?

Wednesday, March 29, 2017

What would happen if you didn't communicate with those closest to you for a few days or even a week? And what if you rattled off a rote, memorized line when you finally did speak to them? Or what if you only reached out to them when you needed something? What would happen to that relationship? It would die. What about God? Do we communicate with him regularly? Do we convey that we love him and value our relationship with him? Or do we only pester him when we are in trouble, or just mumble some memorized "prayer" on occasion?

In today's scripture, Jesus had been teaching and healing and meeting with scores of people. Everyone seemed to want a piece of him. Ever feel like that? Does it seem like everyone wants something from you some days, and all you would like is a little time to yourself?

Earlier in Mark 6, Christ had tried to get away to relax, but a large crowd caught up to him. He proceeded to teach them and feed them. Then, finally, he told his disciples to go on ahead without him so he could be alone... to pray. He didn't want to watch TV or read or eat. He just wanted some time alone with the most important being in his life - his Father. This was not an isolated event, but a frequent habit. If Christ made this a priority, how much more important must it be for us?

So how should we pray? To begin with, we need the right attitude. Pastor and Author Francis Chan sets a great example for us. When you hear him pray, there is a very clear and deliberate silence before he ever utters a word. He doesn't just jump in with a list of requests; he takes the time to realize who he is about to speak to, the very being who holds his every heartbeat and breath under his control. Revelation 4 portrays a majestic, awe-inspiring God, surrounded by many thrones and thunder and lightning and smoke with various beings praising him over and over again. He is not a magic genie in a lamp. This is the Creator and God of the universe! Isaiah came into God's presence once and exclaimed, "It's all over! I am doomed for I am a sinful man." (Isaiah 6:5) This is a natural response when you come with the right attitude before such an awesome being.

Let's follow Jesus' example and talk with our God and our Father regularly. Let's express to him how much we love him and value our relationship with him. But first, stop before you say anything and contemplate who it is you are

about to speak to. Let the weightiness of that prospect fill you with awe, reverence, and humility. Then, and only then, begin to speak, and see if your conversation changes.

Mark 6:45-46

⁴⁵Immediately after this, Jesus insisted that his disciples get back into the boat and head across the lake to Bethsaida, while he sent the people home.

⁴⁶After telling everyone goodbye, he went up into the hills by himself to pray.

Why doesn't Jesus just start talking to God while everyone is around?

Why does he send them away and go up to a private place to talk to God?

What can you do this week to model Jesus' prayer life?

PRAYER

Be silent. Say nothing. Take a breath and realize it was a gift from the one who knows how many breaths you have left. Feel your heart beating. Each contraction of that muscle is caused by the very being who created you. He made you and loves you with a love that is not possible for mere humans to fully comprehend. THAT is who you are about to speak to. Let those realizations fill you with awe and reverence and humility. Has this changed what you were going to talk to God about? Tell your Heavenly Father about it. Pray to him.

How to Avoid Working for the Wrong Reasons

Thursday, March 30, 2017

A hearty handshake, a high five, and fist bumps are all forms of greeting you may receive when walking through the doors of CedarCreek Church. Your familiarity with the other person determines the appropriate mode of affection. These greetings or rituals tell you that you are loved and are welcome into our community of believers. These rituals bless you and hopefully make you feel like you matter. Some rituals do just the opposite. In some communities, new members are hazed and must complete humiliating or dangerous acts to be accepted. We've all heard stories of gang initiations in which a new member must perform a specified activity, often a crime, to become part of the community. Rituals are part of all cultures and are part of what makes us unique; however, sometimes they overshadow their original intent.

A ritual is defined as "a sequence of activities involving gestures, words, and objects, performed in a sequestered place, and performed according to a set sequence." In Mark 7, Jesus looks at the rituals of the Pharisees and chastises them for their adherence to ritual but their neglect of the commands of God. He criticizes their strict adherence to their interpretation of the law of God while ignoring the heart of God. They were so concerned with following the established rules to show how much they "loved God" that they could not love people.

We can do this as well. Sometimes we become so concerned with the way we are dressing, our worship performance, or the exact percentage of our income we give that we miss the opportunities God has placed before us. Other times we shy away from something we know to be right (standing up for our faith at work, praying before a meal in public) to fit in with those around us. We are more concerned with what others think of us that we forget that all that matters is that we honor God with everything we do. Luke encouraged us this past weekend that, "If we want riches in this world and the next, follow Jesus."

Following Jesus is not supposed to be easy. In fact, in John 16:33 he says, "Here on earth you will have many trials and sorrows. But take heart, because I have overcome the world." In James' letter, he exhorts us to persevere under trial so that our faith may be mature and complete (James 1:2-4). In the letter to the Corinthians, Paul encourages us to run the race to win the prize (1 Corinthians 9:24-25). Our earth is not our final home. We as Christians have a

home that will satisfy every longing of our heart. We are quick to embrace the things of this earth and put aside the things of heaven. Our prayer is that our worship, and yours, would be genuine; that you are always seeking after the hidden treasures of wisdom and knowledge found only in Christ.

Mark 7:1-13

¹One day some Pharisees and teachers of religious law arrived from Jerusalem to see Jesus. ²They noticed that some of his disciples failed to follow the Jewish ritual of hand washing before eating. ³(The Jews, especially the Pharisees, do not eat until they have poured water over their cupped hands, as required by their ancient traditions. ⁴ Similarly, they don't eat anything from the market until they immerse their hands in water. This is but one of many traditions they have clung to—such as their ceremonial washing of cups, pitchers, and kettles.)

⁵So the Pharisees and teachers of religious law asked him, “Why don't your disciples follow our age-old tradition? They eat without first performing the hand-washing ceremony.”

⁶Jesus replied, “You hypocrites! Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you, for he wrote,

*‘These people honor me with their lips,
but their hearts are far from me.*

*⁷Their worship is a farce,
for they teach man-made ideas as commands from God.’*

⁸For you ignore God's law and substitute your own tradition.”

⁹Then he said, “You skillfully sidestep God's law in order to hold on to your own tradition. ¹⁰For instance, Moses gave you this law from God: ‘Honor your father and mother,’ and ‘Anyone who speaks disrespectfully of father or mother must be put to death.’ ¹¹But you say it is all right for people to say to their parents, ‘Sorry, I can't help you. For I have vowed to give to God what I would have given to you.’ ¹²In this way, you let them disregard their needy parents. ¹³And so you cancel the word of God in order to hand down your own tradition. And this is only one example among many others.”

Consider the rituals of the Pharisees. We don't have these “washing” requirements, but are there other rituals that you are completing to make yourself right before God?

If you find yourself falling into this trap, how so? List some examples here.

Traditions aren't bad, so long as they don't hinder your relationship with God.

What can you do today to rest in the promises of Jesus and not in your works?

PRAYER

Our prayer for you is that your worship is holy and pleasing to God. Ask God to reveal any area in which you have erected barriers between you and him. Ask God to show you ways that you can practically show his love to those around you and in doing this, discover the heart of God for his people. Pray that you may discover the hidden wisdom and knowledge of God and allow it to transform your relationship with God and those around you.

The Ultimate Ultimatum

Friday, March 31, 2017

We have all been in this place at one time or another. The ultimatum. "My way or the highway." Someone is telling us that it's either this or that, and we don't like it. We never enjoy someone telling us how to live our lives or pushing us to act a certain way. In fact, we will usually go in the opposite direction from the one in which we are being forced just to prove that we can do whatever we want, even if we would prefer the way we are being pushed! This is pure pride. We feel that no one should be able to tell us how to live our lives, which our lives are ours and ours alone. We are the captain of our ship and the master of our souls, right?

Not only is this unadulterated pride, but it is also the ultimate self-delusion. I did not give myself life. I did not put myself in control or make myself independent. I would not even have a life if God did not give it to me. He created me. He knit me together and counted every hair on my head. When I say that I am in control, it is not only conceited; it's an outright lie. But this is the lie of our world today. This is what the world tells us daily: that our lives are our own to do with what we will. Unfortunately, this is not what God wants for our lives. This is not why Jesus came.

If you have been reading along with us in the book of Mark, you might look back and see that up until this point, Jesus is preaching great sermons and performing miracles, but now things begin to change. In chapter 8, he starts talking about his impending death and explaining what it means to be his follower. This is the first passage in which Jesus reveals what many scholars call "the path to the cross."

In this passage, he explains to all of his followers the three things we need to do in order to be his disciples and experience the kingdom of God. The first step is denying ourselves. In this, he means giving up our right to run our lives. The second is taking up our cross. This refers to enduring hardships for the sake of the gospel. This is so hard for us to do, and perhaps that's why in Luke 9:23 the passage reads "take up your cross *daily*." Perhaps because, just like wanting to feel in control of our lives, it's not something that we can just let go of once and be done with. It is a conscious decision that we must make day after day. The third step is to follow him. Jesus tells people time and again to follow him. Pretty simple, but oh, the excuses we make! However, please carefully consider, is any excuse worth [losing your soul](#)?

Mark 8:34-38

³⁴Then, calling the crowd to join his disciples, he said, "If any of you wants to be my follower, you must give up your way, take up your cross, and follow me. ³⁵If you try to hang on to your life, you will lose it. But if you give up your life for my sake and the sake of the Good News, you will save it. ³⁶And what do you benefit if you gain the whole world but lose your soul? ³⁷Is anything worth more than your soul? ³⁸If anyone is ashamed of me and my message in these adulterous and sinful days, the Son of Man will be ashamed of that person when he returns in the glory of his Father with the holy angels."

What does it look like for you to "take up your cross"?

What does it look like to "try and hang on to your life"?

What does Jesus mean when he says, "And what do you benefit if you gain the whole world but lose your soul?"

PRAYER

Father, thank you for giving me a soul and free will to choose how I will live my life. I ask you for the wisdom to choose to give up the illusion of control, the strength to take up my cross daily, and the courage to follow where you lead with no excuses. Amen.