

God Doesn't Want A Mercenary Worshipper

A Sermon by Pr. David Johnson

To begin, I'm going to reference something that happened this past Monday in Chicago. Some of you may assume I'm talking about some kind of violence, but that would be wrong, in fact, this event has never happened before - EVER. This story has nothing to do with guns. I'm talking about baseball – a game between the Minnesota Twins, and the Chicago White Sox. It was the 7th inning, and for the sake of accuracy, I'm going to read the words of one reporter - as he reviewed the event:

"It was a triple play, which is rare enough, but it was an "8-5" triple play and came in a 10-inning 6-3 Minnesota Twins win over the home team Chicago White Sox. The numerical designation means it was started by the centerfielder, the Twins' Byron Buxton, and finished by third baseman Gio Urshela."

He continues, *"You're going to spend the rest of your life watching games and you can watch five a day and you're not going to see an 8-5 triple play,"* White Sox play-by-play man Jason Benetti said. *"But that's exactly what you saw here because nobody tagged up and then, the tag on Moncada and the step on second base."*

You really had to watch the video to appreciate what happened. In itself, the play was amazing enough. But what caught my eye was the number of players who were just standing around watching – wondering what was happening. After all, this had never happened before. But fortunately for the Twins, at least a couple of the players knew the rules, and were paying attention to the play. Well, before anyone really grasped the facts, the White Sox were off the field, and the Twins closed the inning.

You've heard it said that "familiarity breeds contempt." In other words, you can see something happen so often that you don't even notice it anymore. You begin to ignore the obvious. But in this case, it wasn't familiarity that caused contempt, it was the opposite – an 8-5 triple play had NEVER been achieved. So nobody was ready for it when it happened.

This past Thursday we spent time reviewing and studying Jesus' Sermon on the Mount - Matthew 5. In this section, we see that God is not concerned with how we look on the outside. Sadly, anyone can look good...even the religious leaders could do that. No, Jesus wanted his listeners to go deeper, to consider the heart issues of motivation and impulse. And Jesus addresses a number of specific areas as He speaks:

Mt 5:21-22 – Beyond Murder-Hate-Condemnation to Friendship

Mt 5:27-28 – Beyond Adultery-Lust to Self-sacrifice

Mt 5:31-32 – Beyond Divorce to Committed Fidelity

Mt 5:33-34 – Beyond False Vows/Oaths to Integrity/Honesty

Mt 5:38-39 – Beyond Justice/Vindication to Love/Forgiveness

Mt 5:43-44 – Beyond Self-Protection to Intentional Service

But what was going on in the crowd (via the religious leaders) that needed Jesus' corrective explanation? For

starters, they had reduced God's commands and instructions to a kind of religious "to-do" list. They thought, and were taught, that righteousness was about appearance and works - how one looked, and what one did for God. Religion had become a show, impressing God through rituals. *"Familiarity had bred contempt,"* and Jesus needed to set the system straight. He wasn't trying to replace it, mind you; but fulfill what God had established through the prophets.

Matthew 5:17-18 **"Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill. ¹⁸ For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished.**

Sadly, this has been a problem for God throughout the ages. He gives His people instructions for life and worship, and they disobey them or turn them into a means of pride, self-righteousness, or hypocrisy.

a. Disobedience – *I won't do it*

b. Pride and Self-righteousness – *I don't need it*

c. Hypocrisy – *I don't want it, but I'll do it.*

Self-centered worship was a problem for the prophets, for Paul, and for us. You can look around our society today and see the same exact concerns. All around us you'll hear discussions about music, sermons, settings, print or projection, pews or chairs, service or sermon length, etc. But almost all of the discussions center on the human perspective and desires.

Very little of the dialogue asks the question, "What does God desire? What will bring Him honor and glory, regardless of what it may cost me?" Some of the paths chosen by people may even have godly and holy elements. But even these, done for the wrong reasons, bring God no pleasure – as the prophet Isaiah explains:

Isaiah 58:2-4 **"Yet they seek Me day by day and delight to know My ways, As a nation that has done righteousness And has not forsaken the ordinance of their God. They ask Me for just decisions, They delight in the nearness of God. ³ 'Why have we fasted and You do not see? Why have we humbled ourselves and You do not notice?' Behold, on the day of your fast you find your desire, And drive hard all your workers. ⁴ 'Behold, you fast for contention and strife and to strike with a wicked fist. You do not fast like you do today to make your voice heard on high.**

The people sought the Lord. They asked Him for just decisions. They "delight in the nearness of God." But their motivations were all backwards. They fasted, humbled themselves, and struggled through their elements of worship expecting God to jump. "Why have we fasted and You do not see? Why have we humbled ourselves and You do not notice?" It was as if they said, *"I do this and that, therefore God, You're obligated to do what I ask."* To which God answers, *"Wrong! I'm the Master here, I'm the One worshipped and obeyed."*

You see, it's not about the forms as much as it is about the heart of the worshipper. One form can be

pleasing to God when the heart of the believer is right. But that same form can be repulsive to God when the heart of the believer is self-serving and self-righteous.

Luke 6:36 "Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful. 37 "Do not judge, and you will not be judged; and do not condemn, and you will not be condemned; pardon, and you will be pardoned. 38 "Give, and it will be given to you. They will pour into your lap a good measure--pressed down, shaken together, {and} running over. For by your standard of measure it will be measured to you in return." 39 And He also spoke a parable to them: "A blind man cannot guide a blind man, can he? Will they not both fall into a pit? 40 "A pupil is not above his teacher; but everyone, after he has been fully trained, will be like his teacher. 41 "Why do you look at the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? 42 "Or how can you say to your brother, 'Brother, let me take out the speck that is in your eye,' when you yourself do not see the log that is in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take out the speck that is in your brother's eye.

Worship is holy and acceptable when the humble heart of an obedient believer is lived out in daily expressions of kindness, generosity, and service.

Isaiah 58:5-7 "Is it a fast like this which I choose, a day for a man to humble himself? Is it for bowing one's head like a reed And for spreading out sackcloth and ashes as a bed? Will you call this a fast, even an acceptable day to the LORD? 6"Is this not the fast which I choose, To loosen the bonds of wickedness, To undo the bands of the yoke, And to let the oppressed go free And break every yoke? 7"Is it not to divide your bread with the hungry And bring the homeless poor into the house; When you see the naked, to cover him; And not to hide yourself from your own flesh?

As commentator Matthew Henry explains,

"A fast is a day to afflict the soul; if it does not express true sorrow for sin, and does not promote the putting away of sin, it is not a fast. These professors had shown sorrow on stated or occasioned fasts. But they indulged pride, covetousness, and malignant passions. To be liberal and merciful is more acceptable to God than mere fasting, which, without them, is vain and hypocritical. Many who seem humble in God's house, are hard at home, and harass their families. But no man's faith justifies, which does not work by love...Those who do justly and love mercy, shall have the comfort, even in this world. Good works will bring the blessing of God, provided they are done from love to God and man, and wrought in the soul by the Holy Spirit."

Personal righteousness without compassion, charity, and grace, is simply dead orthodoxy. It is a humble heart, applied to the life and worship of a child of God, which will bring honor to the Father. And only when this is achieved can there be blessing to the believer, wholeness to the community, and unity to the Body.

Isaiah 58:8-9 "Then your light will break out like the dawn, And your recovery will speedily spring forth; And your righteousness will go before you; The glory of the LORD will be your rear guard. 9"Then you will call, and the LORD will answer; You will cry, and He will say, 'Here I am.' If you

remove the yoke from your midst, The pointing of the finger and speaking wickedness..."

For the believer, our first and foremost concern should be that which will be pleasing and honoring to God. Our comfort or benefit is God's concern, and will come, if we focus on pleasing Him.

Isaiah 58:10-12 "And if you give yourself to the hungry And satisfy the desire of the afflicted, Then your light will rise in darkness And your gloom will become like midday. 11"And the LORD will continually guide you, And satisfy your desire in scorched places, And give strength to your bones; And you will be like a watered garden, And like a spring of water whose waters do not fail. 12"Those from among you will rebuild the ancient ruins; You will raise up the age-old foundations; And you will be called the repairer of the breach, The restorer of the streets in which to dwell.