

Shine Through God-Centeredness

“Through” vs. You

July 31, 2016

PRELUDE – Might Just Fall In Love

**Worship Song – Your Grace Is Enough /
Our God**

Ministry Moment – Video

**Concert Set: God & The Ground / Good
Side of Crazy / Then There’s You**

Good morning, everyone.

I’m so glad that it worked out that we got to have State Line Drive with us this morning, and not just because they make great music. The reason I’m glad is that a major motivation in what these guys are doing is to be a light to those who do not know God; to those who live in darkness ... which, as

you know (if you've been around North Heartland in recent weeks and months), is what we're focusing on in this season of our ministry. We're taking a deep dive (so to speak) on the issue of what it means for followers of Jesus to be *light* to the world around us both individually and collectively, as a church.

That's what Jesus called us to be. It's what the leaders of the first church understood our mission to be.

As the Apostle Paul once put it:

Do everything without grumbling or arguing, so that you may become blameless and pure, "children of God without fault in a warped and crooked generation." Then you will shine among them like stars in

*the sky as you hold firmly to the
word of life.*

Philippians 2:14-16

(NIV)

And this world *more than ever* needs the light of those who hold firmly to Jesus and who try to follow in His ways. As I've been saying for months now, the overwhelming dissatisfaction with the state of our country is all the evidence we need that this is true. People are frustrated with "the system" and "the establishment" (recent polls show nearly 70% of us think the country is on the wrong track) but those who claim to have "the answer" really don't because they continually miss the point. They continually overlook the root issue.

And when I say that I don't mean to be overly critical or condemning. They're

doing the best they can. I say it because I want those of us who are Christians to understand and value the key role we have in this culture *simply because*, as Christians, we *do* see the root issue and we *do* know the answer.

Why They Need Us

For example, this past week, I took some time to watch the DNC (just as I did with the RNC last week) and I have to say that I was encouraged to hear the leadership of that party repeatedly point out the role of the individual citizen in our system. In her acceptance speech, Hillary Clinton said:

Americans don't say: "I alone can fix it" (which was a rebuttal to a statement in Donald Trump's speech

the previous week).

We say: “We’ll fix it together.”

“Remember,” she said ...

“Our Founders fought a revolution and wrote a Constitution so America would never be a nation where one person had all the power. Two hundred and forty years later, *we still put our faith in each other.*”ⁱ

Very inspirational and, quite frankly from my point of view, motivational.

Unfortunately, however, she left out something very important in that statement. Our Founders (as we have seen in this series) put their faith in God as much as they did each other. They understood

that the freedoms we have as a nation can endure only with a virtuous citizenry. And virtue comes from, as they put it, “religion” which teaches that we are accountable to, as they put it, the Supreme Being.

Furthermore, as to the idea of Americans putting our faith in each other and working together ... it’s a wonderful thought, but the divisiveness and vitriol on display in recent years indicates that it’s less true of us than it’s ever been. The only people most of us trust these days are those look like us, speak like us, think like us, love like us, vote like us. More and more, those who are different from us are perceived as “the enemy,” which is why there is so little civility (just to name one of the many virtues rapidly disappearing from our culture).

And the way you restore that comradery ...

- Is not through great political speeches (and there *were* some great ones last week).
- It's not through voting and elections wherein one person or side always loses (which does *not* build unity).

The only way we're going to regain a sense of togetherness and cooperation in this country is for something to happen internally at the individual level that will produce in each of us the virtues of love, compassion and true tolerance towards those who are not like us. This *is* the root issue that must be addressed.

And it's where you and I come in because

we know what produces that kind of change in people. It's the Holy Spirit at work in the hearts of those who know and follow Jesus. When the Spirit lives in you and you are listening to Him and putting yourself in environments where He is able to repeatedly remind you of the grace you have received, that grace then begins to flow out of you to others.

And when that happens, the prayer Jesus taught us becomes a little more fulfilled.

“Our Father in Heaven,” He began. “May Your Name be hallowed (or respected and honored); may Your Kingdom come and Your will be done on earth as it is in Heaven. *Make up there come down here.*”

All of that to say, yet again ... one more

time, *do not* (if you are a Christian) be fooled by all the political rhetoric. Yes, politics *is* important and, yes, you *should* educate yourself and vote. But *do not* underestimate the importance of who you are as an individual and the importance of who *we* are (and who all churches are) as a community of faith. More than ever our world and our culture needs us to be the light.

A Quick Review

The question we've been trying to answer in this mega-series is how to do that. So we started out by spending a few weeks talking about generosity – which, we discovered, is different from random acts of giving motivated by need or guilt. Generosity is the premeditated, calculated, designated

emancipation of personal financial assets for the people and causes God loves.

And then we spent a few weeks talking about graciousness – which, we discovered, is not the same thing as being nice to people like us and to people we like. Instead, graciousness is the unconditional predisposition to treat “them” (meaning “those who are not like us and those who we do not like”) better than they deserve because that’s how God treats us in Jesus.

Those two characteristics of generosity and graciousness are so foreign to this culture that they naturally (or supernaturally) produce light. They reveal to people that there’s a better way to live that is rooted in a relationship with God and God’s people.

But there's a third light-giving characteristic which we've been looking at in this current series and that is the quality of *God-centeredness*.

Now, in a culture where almost everyone believes in God (a recent Gallup survey showed that 89% of Americans doⁱⁱ), the idea of being God-centered doesn't sound all that unique. God-centeredness, it would seem, is a way to describe people who take their faith a step or two further than the average person; maybe even to the point of being a little kooky about it.

But God-centeredness is not the same thing as faith on overdrive. In fact, God centeredness is not even what most Christians think it is.

Most Christians think being God-centered means putting God at the center of your life, as this little diagram illustrates.



And there's nothing wrong with that – it's a much better way to live than the alternative. But the problem is that the world in that picture is still all about you and your life and you and your life do not make up “all-encompassing reality.” Only God and God's life do.

His world is much bigger than yours. His past, present and future is much bigger than yours. His focus and agenda is bigger than yours.

Therefore, a truly God-centered perspective of reality looks more like this:



... where God (not you or me) is at the center of all things that exist (and do not exist) both inside of time and space and outside of time and space.

That's why Paul once wrote that "*in Him* we live and move and have our being" – not the other way around. You and I are a little speck in the whole of reality over which God reigns. *He* is the Primary and Essential Being in the Universe. Everything is contingent on *Him*.

And since that is true, that demands a certain attitude from those of us who are *not* the primary and essential being on whom everything depends. And that

attitude is what we're calling God-centeredness.

God-centeredness is humble, accountable, obedient and dependent submission to the Primary Being in the Universe.

God-centeredness is *humble* because we start out by admitting that our default picture of reality is wrong. In reality ...

- It's all about Thee and not about Me.
- It's hallowed be *Thy* name, not hallowed be *my* name.
- It's *Thy* Kingdom come, not *my* kingdom come.
- It's *Thy* will be done, not *my* will be done.

The first step in the transition to a God-

centered life is when you realize that God is at the center of everything and you humble yourself and you begin submitting and aligning your life to that reality. One of those alignments (and we talked about this in the first week) is setting aside one day a week to be with other believers to honor God through worship and teaching.

Another of those alignments – and this is a really big one which we talked about two weeks ago – is where we confess that “it’s all *Thine*, not *mine*” meaning that *everything that I possess in this life belongs ultimately to God* because He’s one who gave it to me or made it possible for me ... which means that I am just a temporary manager. And one day I will be called to account for how well I leveraged everything I have for God’s Kingdom and God’s glory. God-

centeredness is *accountable submission* to God.

And then last week, we learned that when a person is living a God-centered life “thus saith the Lord” matters more than “us saith.” In other words, what God says about how to live trumps what our culture says or what we in our own wisdom say.

And this only makes sense. After all, if God truly is at the center of all reality and gives a directive on what’s good and what is evil – on what we should do or not do – then we, especially if we’re Christians, ought to listen and obey.

As Jesus once put it:

“Why do you call me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ and do not do what I say?”

Luke 6:46 (NIV)

Great question ... because true God-centeredness produces obedient submission to what God says.

And – just to be clear – we don't obey to try and win His favor (Jesus has already done that for us in dying as atonement for our sin) but because – and this will turn out to be very important for what we're going to talk about in the final part of our definition – *we obey because we know that God only wants what's best for us.* He wants our lives to be full and rich – “abundant” Jesus called it – instead of crashing and burning because of foolishness and outright sin.

So, obviously, we need to *know* what He says and then, try to *do* what He says – which was the point of the challenge I gave

at the end of last week's message.

The Challenge

If you were here or watching online, you know that I challenged everyone to read Matthew chapters five through seven, which is Jesus' most famous teaching: *The Sermon on the Mount*. I said to ...

- First, read one chapter (which would take about 10 minutes).
- Then, write down something that Jesus says to think or believe or to do or not do
- And then try to put it into practice for the rest of the week.

And I actually got several responses from folks who took the challenge.

One guy wrote to me:

“I’ve been experiencing some severe anxiety and I read Matthew 6 and it made all the difference. I let things get to me and it kind of spins out of control. Thanks for suggesting that reading.”

Personally, I had a similar experience last week where I started feeling overwhelmed and irritated when things that were not working as I had hoped. Then I remembered what Jesus said in Matthew 6: *Do not worry. Seek first God’s kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.* And I took a deep breath and I said, “OK, God, help me figure this out.” And I calmed down and the solution to my problem became clear.

I suspect that some of you may have had a similar positive experience with the challenge.

On the other hand, I also heard from a person who said:

“I didn’t even get through Matthew 5 before I had a huge list of what not to do so I got discouraged and stopped reading. Am I just being a big baby and missing the point entirely?”

And I suspect that some of you may have had a similar negative experience, so I want to say something about that.

When you take the time to really listen to what Jesus says about what to do and what not to do, one of the things that happens is

that it reveals just how much lower our standards are in comparison to God's. For example:

- In God's mind, hateful expressions of anger are almost as bad as murder. (If you read Matthew 5, you probably remember that). But we yell and even cuss at people as if it is nothing.
- In God's mind, being generous with our financial assets is the only sane way to live. (If you read Matthew 6, you probably remember that). But we worry about having enough so we hoard our money as if that's our ultimate security instead of God.

Listening to Jesus reveals just how much lower our standards are in comparison to

God's and that *we are masters of self-deception who think much more highly of ourselves than we ought to.*

And we do that because, most of the time, we're comparing ourselves to other people; in particular, people who are not like us and who we don't like, which, of course, means *we're better than them.* Oh, we wouldn't dare say that out loud and we might not even think it, but most of us tend to rank ourselves high on the moral scale in comparison to "them."

So when it happens that we give attention to God's standard and we compare ourselves to *that*, it becomes very clear just how far we miss the mark and how hard it is to be God-centered.

And if we're not careful, those two realizations can become discouraging enough to the point where we give up. Because it sounds like the only way you can be God-centered and the only way you can be the light that Jesus calls his followers to be is *if you are perfect*. And in this life, not a single one of us is going to come anywhere close. So why even try?

And I know that's how it works because I have felt that way enough times in my life. And I know that some of you feel that way right now. And if you do, here's what I want to say to you:

- You should try because we know that God only wants what's best for us.
- You should try because even when you fail, there is no condemnation to those

who are in Christ Jesus.

- You should try because being God-centered isn't about being perfect. *It's about being dependent.* Remember the definition?

God-centeredness is the humble, accountable, obedient and *dependent* submission to the Primary Being in the Universe.

Dependent Living

Now, here's what "dependence" means and what it looks like in a God-centered person. It's real simple.

Are you ready?

Dependence means "IT'S NOT ALL UP TO ME." <repeat>

I put that in really big letters because it's so important!

In fact, let's all say it together out loud. Ready? Here we go:

“IT’S NOT ALL UP TO ME.”

This truth is the key to the God-centered life.

- God is at the center of the Universe and in control of everything and, therefore, I don't have to be. *It's not all up to me.*
- God is the Primary and Essential Being in the Universe and, therefore, I don't have to be. *It's not all up to me.*
- God is God and, therefore, I don't have to be. *It's not all up to me.*

- God is my Redeemer and my Righteousness and, therefore, I don't have to be. *It's not all up to me.*

As we so often say around here, “Jesus lived the perfect life I should be living and died the death I should have to die” and, because of that, I am forgiven and free from condemnation.

*God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. 2
Corinthians 5:21 (NIV)*

I don't have to live in defeat and discouragement because, in reality, I am *not* defeated. Thank God! It's not all up to me!

Thank God that ...

He who began the good work within you will continue His work until it is finally finished on the day when Christ Jesus returns. Philippians 1:6 (NLT)

It's not all up to me.

Thank God that ...

I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. Galatians 2:20 (NIV)

It's not all up to me.

Thank God that I don't have to pretend to be perfect. In fact ...

I am glad to boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ can work through me.

2 Corinthians 12:9 (NLT)

It's not all up to me.

Thank God that ...

... in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do all this through him who gives me strength.

Philippians 4:12-13 (NIV)

It's not all up to me.

Thank God that ...

In all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.

Romans 8:37 (NIV)

Thank you, Lord, that it's THROUGH YOU and not all up to me because in this life I will never be all I should be.

And therefore, because it's not all up to me ... <deep breath> ... I can *relax* about my life because I am ultimately depending on God to work in me and through me to do what I cannot do for myself. I can have peace. I can resist and cease striving. I can have a spirit of quietness and rest. I can pray without ceasing. I can walk by faith and not by sight. I can live with hope and joy even when my circumstances aren't the way I want them to be.

I can ...

Seek first His Kingdom and His righteousness [I can embrace

the reality that God and his concerns are at the center of the Universe and align my life accordingly] and [trust that] all these things will be given to [me] as well.

Matthew 6:33 (NIV)

And that confidence I have, that trust I have – even though it's not always 100% perfect – that is light in the darkness because even though most people claim to believe in God, almost everyone lives as if it's all up to them. And that's why everyone is so crazy and stressed out.

But there's a better way – a way of hope, confidence and joy through a God-centered life ...

- Where it's all about Thee and not about Me

- Where everything I have is all Thine and not Mine
- Where “Thus” trumps “Us” (what God says trumps what we and our culture think is right)
- And the power to be and do what God wants us to be and do is “Through” not “You.” It’s not all up to us. It’s through him.

Let’s be God-centered. Let’s be light.

And let’s pray together to that end.

Father in Heaven, I pray that out of your glorious riches you may strengthen everyone here or watching online with power through the Spirit in our inner being. I pray that in every heart here or watching online, Christ may dwell through

faith.

And I pray that everyone listening to this message, being rooted and established in Your love, may have power, together with all of Your people everywhere, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge. I pray that everyone may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of all that You are.

And now ...

- To You on whom we can depend
- To You who are able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to *Your power that is at work within us*
- To You be glory in each of us, and in

the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.ⁱⁱⁱ

Would you please stand and let's sing a prayer of dependence together? Then I have a few brief things I want to say before we leave.

Here we go.

Worship Song – Lord I Need You

CLOSING COMMENTS

1. Prayer pastor – Kitti
2. Service Time is what next Sunday?
3. Teacher Supply Giveaway – incredible reports ... “Hallowed”
4. Offering @Door (or Kiosk!)

Endnotes

i

http://www.realclearpolitics.com/video/2016/07/28/hillary_clinton_united_states_is_at_a_moment_of_reckoning.html

ii <http://newbostonpost.com/2016/06/30/poll-fewer-americans-believe-in-god-than-in-past-decades/>

iii Ephesians 3:16-20