

Putting on the "Outside of Myself" Glasses

Call to Worship: John 15:9-17

Hymn #286- *We Gather Together*

1st Scripture: Ephesians 4:1-6

Hymn #280- *I Love Thy Kingdom, Lord*

2nd Scripture: Philippians 2:1-11

Hymn #285- *Blest be the Tie that Binds*

Introduction:

One of the ground breaking video games, which helped to usher our culture into the world of computer gaming was the game, "Pac-Man." And the primary hero of this game; the "Pac-Man," was a large round dot who kept opening and closing his mouth, as the gamer, you, maneuvered him through a semi-maze like board. And your goal was to eat all of these little dots on the screen, without running into these ghosts, who would seek to chase you down the whole time. And your one saving grace for defeating the ghosts, especially when they came close to trapping you, was to chomp on one of four "power pellets" found in the four corners of the board, which would make the ghosts themselves edible for a short period of time.

In many ways, "Pac-Man," reminds me of both the structure that governs our American culture and the structure that governs our naturally fallen hearts. We are "consumers" by nature, aren't we? In fact, we have so embraced the "consumer" mentality, that we actually call ourselves "consumers," don't we? We live in a culture that works so well with our flesh--afterall, our culture is formed by the common principles of our common flesh--a culture that profits off of, and emphasizes the importance of "Me-ness." Man is at the center of our culture. Advertisers have located and greatly capitalized on this reality, have they not? How do you best sell products to the "consumers?" Set people up as the kings and rulers of their own lives; treat them as individual, royal subjects, and they will purchase your products. Emphasize "people" and their felt needs, and you will win them over, and in doing so, you will fill up the coffers of your own personal kingdom. We are naturally self-focused, selfishly ambitious people, and appealing to that reality is a win/win situation in our fallen world.

And so, products are created and packaged in such a way that you can happily rule in your own kingdom. Food is made "your way." Hence, the popular sale's slogan, "Have it your way." That only works in a culture that is fat and able to revel in an abundance of everything. In most cultures, there are no options. There are no, "Hmmm, shall we have spaghetti and meatballs, burgers and fries or pizza." In most cultures, you take what you get, or you get nothing, and even what you do get, you don't get three or more times a day. Now brethren, please understand me. I don't want to say that it is necessarily sinful to have much, but when that "much" is taken for granted, and a culture of appetite serving (a culture of consumerism) prevails; that can easily become a gluttonous, idolatrous reality...and it is for our culture.

"Me-centeredness" is even at the center of our secular counseling models. "So, you are depressed? You have a problem with pornography and lust? You abuse your children? You are an alcoholic or a drug addict?...well, it must be the fault of your parents, your upbringing or the poor influence of society and others on you. You are the victim though...and that is what is most important to realize." You see, calling people to personal responsibility and confronting people with sin is not a very desirable thing in a culture of consumerism. It just doesn't sell. Even many churches have caught onto this, and they have made the proper adjustments. "You want to build a big and successful church? Don't talk about sin and hell and repentance or anything negative. Just tell them that Jesus loves them no matter what, and that He is weeping with and for them; that He died to make them happy and wants them to have the best in this world. Why, if Jesus were here right now, He would, (contrary to John 6), build His own miracle bread factory, where He would miraculously just give everyone whatever they wanted all the time, without any strings attached...etc." Now, they may not put it like that, but that is what is at the heart of their "man-centered" Gospel.

Suffice it to say, brethren, that we are a culture of "Pac-Men"...we want, we want, we want...we must have, and in keeping with the American Dream, we ought to do whatever it takes to climb the corporate ladder, so that we can build our own happy little kingdom. And this, brethren is at the very heart of our culture. And if we are honest; it is at the heart of our own flesh. There is no room for suffering or self-sacrifice or "other-mindedness," and certainly not "God-centeredness" in this type of a mindset. Our focus is limited to the dots that lie in front of us, and when the ghosts get in the way, we will find a way to consume them as well.

When Christ came into this world, He brought with Him a profoundly different mindset. The principles that governed Him were so unnatural and bizarre to us that it was as if He were literally from another planet. I mean, the God of all glory, being born in a feeding trough, unwilling to chase after the royal life, that could have rightly been His? God incarnate, as a man, having no place to rest His head...being homeless as it were, denying the natural pains of starvation because He was too busy thinking about a worthless Samaritan woman? The eternal Creator suffering terribly at the hands of His mocking creatures, only to pray the prayer, "Father forgive them, they know not what they do," after they beat Him mercilessly and nailed Him to a cross...continuing to further mock Him. Preparing to die, having no thought of His own well-being and what He was facing, He concerns Himself with the future welfare of His mother and the eternal destiny of a dying thief. Dying, rising again, and that unto the restoration and encouragement of His disciples. While He ought to have been chiding His unfaithful followers, He is cooking fish for them at the seashore, preparing to use those who were unworthy of being used. And following His ascension to glory, He still intercedes on behalf of His people; He intercedes for us, a bunch of Jonah's, who would naturally run away from the will of God. No, He doesn't forsake us, and build another church. He doesn't start again with Moses. He takes us idolators; us golden calf makers, and loves and cherishes us, unflinchingly determined to form us into His own image at all costs. Our Lord just doesn't seem to fit too well into our "consumerism" model, does He? Quite the American failure, if you ask me.

But here is the kicker, brethren: If anyone wants to come after Him (if anyone wants to follow Christ), then they too must take up their crosses daily, denying themselves," so that they might walk the path that leads to Golgotha. The path to Golgotha is the path that constantly moves toward the place of crucifixion; toward the place of self-sacrifice; toward the place of putting to death the whole "me-centered" consumer mindset, which is prevalent in our culture; in our own naturally fallen hearts, and dare I say, that which seems to be prevalent in the *church* of America at this time.

Brethren, Christ became a Man; God became a man, and lived and died and was raised again, in order to redeem us from the penalty and power of our sins. He came not only to save us...that He did. But He came to change us. He came to remove the culture of "us;" He came to rescue us from the culture of "us" (the culture of "us" is a violent, wicked, self-destructive

culture), so that we might live the true and proper humanity; the joyful, fulfilling humanity of the culture of "Christ"; the "God-centered" culture. And the "God-centered" culture; the culture that says, "My food is to do the will of the Father," is a culture that turns our eyes outward in the direction of others. And this is foundational for our life in the church together, brethren. This is foundational. It is unnatural and foundational.

As we begin our "church family" month, I want to start by exhorting us unto a critical end for which Christ has purchased us. And brethren, if we don't consciously pursue this end; if we don't consciously cooperate with the Holy Spirit unto pursuing this end, continually/daily, we will not move toward it. For, our natural inclination is "consumerism." Our natural focus is inward. Our natural focus is what is presented to us constantly by the world; by every example and source of information in the world (music, media, movies, psychology...etc). Everything moves comfortably in the wrong direction. We actually have to run counter-cultural and counter-flesh. This takes work! This takes ongoing, daily, conscious effort. But the good news is, that those who move this way in faith, will find God meeting them with His real, divine power. It is not easy to do this, but we must strive to constantly put on the "outside of myself glasses," if we are going to faithfully serve Christ, especially in the building of His church, our forever family!

I. Putting on the "Outside of Myself" Glasses

I love the beginning of Philippians, chapter two, because the Apostle Paul is reaching for motivation in an ocean of blessing, as a means of compelling the Philippians to whole heartedly and consciously following his instructions. But he does this in a semi-sarcastic fashion. It were almost as if he were saying, "Look, if you can find any encouragement in Christ at all, even a drop; if there is an ounce of love within you that can be drawn from the comfort and hope that are found in Christ; if there is any fellowship of the Spirit, which Christ calls for; if there is any affection and mercy at all within you, to be taken from your union in Christ...then do this." Paul's focus of attention here is almost ridiculous isn't it? It ought to lead us to say, "Paul, are you kidding me! Of course these things exist in Christ! How could we be so unaffected by so great and glorious a Gospel as to not have these qualities and virtues, even in abundance. We

should not have to dig deep for these things at all. The Gospel is glorious! Christ is most precious! It would be a great insult to act as if Christ is so small a matter to us! He is everything in fact!" And Paul wants them to think this way. He wants to bring them to contemplate all that they are and have in Christ, so that the "if" of his statement is seen almost as an insult in the light of the "overwhelming" that they have in Christ. But Paul wants them to recognize this! He intentionally calls them to consider if there are even drops of virtue within the Gospel ocean that drowns them in grace, so that they might be fervently compelled unto the obligations to which he is about to call them.

"Fulfill my joy then, by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind." Ahhh...here is the catch then! Here is where the conscious effort comes in. If so great a salvation exists that is worthy of providing you with every grace and virtue in Christ; if the Gospel and Christ are indeed that precious to you, then work toward exercising your verbal "Amen" in the direction of a very difficult and challenging ongoing practice. Be "like minded! Have the same love! Be of one accord and of one mind!" Bring your every goal, intent and purpose into the same realm and function, and live right there together! Let the will of Christ be that which governs your every action, and meet each other there, sharing the same purpose, leaving your own self-interests and personality differences at the door. Die to you, and live unto the greater purpose and will of Christ! Be united in this way! Love one another in this way! Walk together, sharing this same underlying and life shaping goal!

And you can only do this if you "let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself" (vs. 3). Do you love Christ? "Of course, I do Paul! What kind of a question is that?" Is the Gospel sufficient for the purpose of motivating you to serve Christ, in any respect? "Paul, you are being ridiculous! The Gospel is everything! Christ is my all in all! He is my first love! I would do anything for Christ...anything!" Oh, you would? "Yes!" Well, here is what I want you to do then. I want you to take all of that love that you have for Christ; I want you to bring all of your understanding of the glorious, incomprehensible love that Christ has for you, and I want you to pack it into one large ball, and I want you to let it explode within your soul. And then, release that energy in the direction of consciously crucifying your own interests, seeking to obtain and maintain a lowliness of mind that places everyone else above you. Esteem everyone else more, and die to

you. Crucify the consumer in you and look to the needs and welfare of others, and especially your brethren. Get the focus off of you constantly, and drive it in the direction of others! Live like the Christ whom you profess to love! "Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others" (vs. 4). Work toward the development of a society, of a culture that is "Christ centered" and "others centered." Work toward building His church! And friends, a church that is constantly set to such a pursuit, will stand out in the world, and the world will know that there is a God in Israel!

And herein lays the underlying principle, brethren. Herein lays the 101 of recognizing and being a part of the church family. We must consciously strive to do what is completely unnatural and counter cultural. We must strive, *for* the love of Christ, motivated *by* the love of Christ, to put on the "outside of myself glasses."

1) At the very basic level that means desiring to be among the people of God! "Let me see, TV or the evening service?" That is a no brainer! The evening service, where God's people are meeting together! "The prayer meeting or relaxation." The prayer meeting of course! "A fellowship event or personal comfort?" Why, fellowship of course.

2) That changes our whole mindset for being here. "Well, I want to be fed...I didn't get fed today..." That is the consumerism mindset, brethren. The "I" must go! The "I" has been crucified with Christ, hasn't it? "I" no longer lives but it is Christ who now lives in me, and the life which "I" now lives, lives by faith in the Son of God!" Rather than ask, "How was I fed today or how was I ministered too," the love of Christ drives us to ask, "How did I worship today...in spite of contrary feelings and emotions....How did I minister to others; did I pursue and recognize the needs of others, and did I meet them...did I encourage, exhort and build up anyone today. You see, brethren, consumerism destroys the world. Focusing outward builds up and prospers the church! Focusing outward on the needs of others, reshapes the world by displaying the Kingdom of God on earth!

With Paul, I ask you then, brethren, is there anything powerful about the Gospel at all, which could motivate us in this direction? Is the glory of Christ worthy of any such action, though it leads us to agonize, to struggle, to self-sacrifice and to contend with the wiles of the world, the flesh and the devil? I guess it all comes down to this, brethren: Is Christ worth it? Do

you love Christ this morning? Do you? "Well, of course." Then, feed and love His sheep. Don't ponder and focus on how little you can do, because after all, you have your Christian liberty, and you don't want to be legalistic...focus on how much more you can do! Not out of legal compulsion, but out of love for Christ!

"Well, that takes great humility and great lowliness, pastor!" Well, ok, maybe you are right. Just let this be the standard that you use, when seeking to pursue this kind of a lowly, God-honoring, others focused mindset...[Read verses 5-16].

Amen!!!