

NEW HOPE SERMON – DOING VS. BEING



In a conversation with someone this week, a stimulating exchange took place. I had prayed for him in the opportunities he has currently that God’s wisdom and grace would be on him so he could fulfill the purposes God has for him. After the prayer, he pushed back against that sense of fulfilling our purpose as a primacy life-focus of doing. It is what he has experienced in many circles – that life was all about what we do for God. And so the conversation began. . . .

Finding that balance and how it works out practically in our priorities has been a topic of debate for centuries. How would you describe the balance?

Think with me as I have pondered this issue this week.

BEING

God’s expressed goal for those who become part of His family in Christ is to conform us to Christ’s character and to enjoy Him. We are to act like his precious sons and daughters in our relationship with Him, to love His Word and listen to the words the Spirit speaks to us. We are to develop an intimate relationship with Him. I think of the old hymn “In the Garden”:

I come to the garden alone when the dew is still on the roses. And the voice I hear, falling on my ear, the Son of God discloses.

Refrain: and he walks with me, and he talks with me, and he tells me I am his own,
And the joy we share, as we tarry there, none other has ever known.

He speaks and the sound of his voice is so sweet the birds hush their singing,
And the melody that he gave to me within my heart in ringing. Refrain.

The primacy of being with God is the Mary posture from Luke 10:39. Jesus and the disciples were visiting Mary and Martha’s home and while Martha was busy doing all the various preparations to serve them, “Mary was sitting at Jesus’s feet, listening to his words.” When Martha complained about Mary’s “wrong” priorities, Jesus said, “Mary has chosen the better part and it will not be taken away from her” (Lk.10:42). Why did Jesus praise Mary’s actions? She was honoring Jesus by wanting to be at his feet and learn from him. She was expressing her devotion and had made this a priority over the preparations needed to show proper hospitality to him. Jesus’ reprimand to Martha was not that she was serving Him, but that she was anxious and troubled in her serving and thought poorly of her sister because Mary was not helping her. Martha’s heart was wrong, not her actions.

Another Mary in the New Testament, Mary Magdalene, showed similar devotion to Jesus. After He had healed her of 7 demons, she became part of the team of women who traveled with Jesus’s group and took care of his needs. She was among others who had come to the tomb after his death to anoint his body with spices. Yet, she stayed

behind and was devastated when his body was no longer in the tomb. Jesus rewarded that devotion by appearing to Mary first after he had risen. Then he commissioned Mary to be the first one to tell the disciples that she had seen the Lord and He was risen from the dead. It was an extraordinary privilege given to a woman –because women’s witness was not highly esteemed in the culture. Jesus honored Mary’s devotion to Him. Similarly, our love for Christ matters to the Lord. He has based our relationship with Him on a mutual love, and we have the joy of showing that love by putting Him first in the time we spend with Him and in our praise and worship.

Interestingly, this primary importance of loving the Lord was the focus of Jesus’s words to Peter after Peter’s denial. After His resurrection when Jesus appeared to Peter and his colleagues, Jesus asked Peter three times if Peter loved him. He didn’t ask if Peter was sorry or had repented for his denials. He didn’t ask Peter why he had gone back to fishing. He said, “Simon, son of John, do you love me? (Jn.21:15-17). Do you love me? Do you love me more than these?” More than other disciples, more than your fishing career, more than yourself and your sense of failure and shame? ‘Do you love me?’ It’s a question Jesus still asks of each of His followers today.

That’s the primacy of being.

DOING

But that wasn’t all that Jesus said to Peter. And, accepting Mary Magdalene’s devotion was not all Jesus asked Mary. Both were given jobs to do for the Lord. Peter was commissioned to feed and care for the new believers in Christ. Mary Magdalene was told to go tell the disciples of Christ’s resurrections even though they might not believe her or give her any credibility as a woman witness. Jesus was giving both of them, and all His disciples down through the centuries since then, the mandate of serving Him.

This is seen, as well, in his last words to the disciples before he ascended. After his resurrection, He had met with them for 40 days, given them his peace, given them a biblical tutorial of how scriptures had been fulfilled (Lk.24:19-27, 36, 45-48), and assured them of his reality as the risen Lord (Luke:24: 40-42). Then he told them to meet him on a mountain in Galilee. There, his last words to them were what we call now The Great Commission:

¹⁸ Then Jesus came close to them and said, “All the authority of the universe has been given to me.^[a] ¹⁹ Now go *in my authority* and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. ²⁰ And teach them to faithfully follow^[b] all that I have commanded you. And never forget that I am with you every day, even to the completion of this age.”^[c]

The verbs in that commission are action verbs – doing verbs: go, make disciples, baptizing and teaching “them to follow all I have commanded you.” This was consistent with His pattern while he was still on earth as well. He sent out the Twelve and the seventy to preach about the coming kingdom and to heal the sick and deliver those who were possessed by demons. Obedience to God’s call is a matter of stewardship, and should be a top priority in our life choices and how we spend each day, how we spend our money, what relationships we develop etc. As the hymn says:

All for Jesus, all for Jesus, all my being’s ransomed powers, all my thoughts and words and doings,
all my days and all my hours. Let my hands perform his bidding, let my feet run in His ways, let
eyes see Jesus only, let my lips speak forth his praise. (words: Mary James)

But this priority issue is not an either/or. It is a both/and. The doing has to flow out of the being. The problems come when an over-emphasis on doing, doing, doing overshadows the significance of being. Being with Jesus and being made like Jesus must come first. The Holy Spirit can only flow out of us *if the Spirit* has first filled us up and is transforming us. We will each need God’s guidance to balance these two ends of the continuum properly. God

wants to lead us individually and through community in how to fulfill who God has designed us to be and the calling He puts on our lives as the steward of His work in us. You will discover that balance when you take the time to listen and understand God's love for you and the ways He wants you to demonstrate that love to others.

For me, I resonate with Paul's motivation for his life as a Jesus follower expressed through 2 Cor. 5:14: "For the love of Christ controls us, thrust us out." We love Him because He first loved us and in gratitude for that salvation, we then seek to be His ministers of reconciliation and messengers of reconciliation, not living on our own agenda, but living on God's agenda. Here is 2 Cor. 5:14-21 (Passion translation):

¹⁴ For it is Christ's love that fuels our passion and motivates us,^[a] because we are absolutely convinced that he has given his life for all of us. This means all died with him,¹⁵ so that those who live^[b] should no longer live self-absorbed lives but lives that are poured out for him—the one who died for us and now lives again. . . .¹⁸ And God has made all things new,^[c] and reconciled^[d] us to himself, and given us the ministry of reconciling others to God. ¹⁹ In other words, it was through the Anointed One that God was shepherding the world,^[h] not even keeping records of their transgressions, and he has entrusted to us the ministry of opening the door of reconciliation to God.^[i] ²⁰ We are ambassadors^[j] of the Anointed One who carry the message of Christ to the world, as though God were tenderly pleading^[k] with them directly through our lips. So we tenderly plead with you on Christ's behalf, "Turn back to God and be reconciled to him."

In summary, let me close with 4 application questions:

- What makes you want to get up in the morning?
- How is Christ's love fueling your passion to be more like Him?
- What priorities reflect His Lordship in your life?
- And how are you living out His mandate to go and make disciples, advance His kingdom agenda, and bring great praise to Him among the nations?

Here are 3 songs that anchor my life to keep all this in balance:

1. When morning gilds the skies, my heart awakening cries, 'May Jesus Christ be praised!' When evening shadows fall, this is my curfew call, 'May Jesus Christ be praised!' Alike at work and prayer, to Jesus I repair, 'May Jesus Christ be praised!'

2. I love You, Lord, and I lift my voice to worship You, o my soul, rejoice. Take joy my King in what You hear, may it be a sweet, sweet sound in your ear.

3. I the Lord of sea and sky, I have heard my people cry, all who dwell in dark and sin, my hand will save. I who made the stars of night, I will make their darkness bright. Who will bear my light to them? Whom shall I send?

Refrain: Here I am, Lord, is it I Lord? I have heard your calling in the night.

I will go, Lord, if [I substitute where] you lead me; I will hold your people in my heart.

I the Lord of wind and flame, I will tend the poor and lame, I will set a feast for them,

My hand will save. Finest bread I will provide, till their hearts are satisfied.

I will give my life to them. Whom shall I send?

Refrain: Here I am, Lord, is it I Lord? I have heard your calling in the night.

I will go, Lord, if [I substitute where] you lead me; I will hold your people in my heart.

I put that word substitution of "where" instead of "if" in the last song because God is always calling us to be on His agenda. He has a plan for each of us. The issue is not going IF he calls but going WHERE He calls.

All for His sake, by His power, for His glory.

Amen.

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