INTERACTING WITH THE SERMON

SYNOPSIS OF THE SERMON

This weekend, Pastor Rich discussed what all our work, striving, and transformation are aiming at: The creation of the Beloved Community. Displaying this in the context of the Montgomery Bus Boycott in 1955-1956, Pastor Rich determined that the greatest miracle in this event was not the victory that was won in the name of equality, but rather Dr. Martin Luther King’s reaction to what had transpired. Dr. King said, “It is true that as we struggle for freedom in America we will have to boycott at times. But we remember as we boycott that the boycott is not an end within itself… [the] the end is reconciliation, the end is redemption, the end is the creation of the beloved community.” How then do we begin to create such a community?

Pastor Rich started by pointing out that the Beloved Community is created by how we think about ourselves. Paul teaches in Romans 12:3 to “not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you.” Rich pointed out that while many of us approach ourselves based on how we feel, Paul exhorts us to approach ourselves based on how we think. The reason for this, Rich notes, is rooted in verse 2: “Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.” Rich said that we approach ourselves by how we think because “as you are thinking, as your mind is submitted and surrendered to the Word of God, to the Spirit of God, to the best thinking of the people of God, you are going to be someone who can build the Beloved Community.” In contrast to this, Rich points out that if we don’t heed Paul’s warning in verse 3 to “not think of yourself more highly than you ought,” we begin to engage in destructive thinking. Rich showed example upon example of how misplaced pride destroys community. The answer to this, he said, is not an examination of our self-esteem, but an examination of our God-esteem. When we esteem God to the extent that we should, and refuse to minimize any of His power, any of His greatness, any of His goodness, we begin to win this battle against pride.

What then is the beginning of the correct way to think about ourselves? Rich gave two options: First, in accordance with the gospel. There is no better beginning for our thoughts than to stop thinking about ourselves and start thinking about Christ. Who are you in relation to Christ? He calls you his bride; He calls himself your shepherd. What has Christ done for you? He has shown his radical love for you. When your thoughts about yourself start here, you are on your way to building the Beloved Community. The second option is thinking about yourself in accordance with your gifts. When you think about yourself in
accordance with your gifts, you are thinking about yourself in relationship to what God has given you to build up the church. We see in verses 4-5 that in Christ we form one body, and that “each member belongs to all the others.” As a result, Rich said, members of the Beloved Community understand that there are no individual parts. The arm does not say to the eye “I do not need you!” Instead, if a member of the Beloved Community is lost, the whole Community feels this “amputation.” Thus, when we think about ourselves in accordance with our gifts, we are really thinking about who we are as a vital member of the Beloved Community, whose members belong to us as we belong to them (v. 5), not as an individual.

Finally, Rich highlighted the need to discover our gifts and employ our gifts to build up the Beloved Community.

In 5 minutes or less, briefly give a synopsis of this week’s sermon. What insight, principle, or observation from this weekend’s message did you find to be most helpful, eye-opening, or troubling? Explain.

GETTING THE CONVERSATION STARTED

These questions can be used as ice-breakers in the beginning OR interwoven between the questions below to draw the group into the discussion.

• What are one or two things from this weekend’s sermon that really stood out to you?
• How do you think about yourself? Are your first thoughts about you rooted in relationship to Christ or in relationship to others? Or are they rooted in you? Maybe this is something that you find varies greatly based on the situation you are in. If so, what are those situations and why do you think they provoke certain thought patterns?
• To what extent do you “esteem” God? What would it look like for us to approach every situation in our lives with God-esteem as our first concern instead of salvaging our own self-esteem?

SCRIPTURE STUDY

Study Goal: What does it look like to have God-esteem before Self-esteem? We have talked about putting the heart of God before our own heart, but what does that really look like? Let’s look at another example from the life of Moses (Pastor Rich used Exodus 4:10-11 to help illustrate this point this weekend) in order to gain some insight. Numbers 12:3 calls Moses “the most humble man on the face of the earth,” so clearly, he did something right.

Context: We are going to look at Numbers 14:1-19. We open on a scene typical of the Old Testament: Despite God’s goodness and provision, the Israelites are doubting God and are succumbing to the temptation to go their own way. At this point the Israelites are about to begin the conquest of the Promised Land and at God’s command Moses
had sent twelve scouts into the land to survey it. When they came back, they confirmed the land’s exquisite nature, but also said that its inhabitants were strong in body and in number and that regardless of God’s promise, that the Israelites could not defeat such opposition. Only two scouts, Joshua and Caleb, trusted in the Lord enough to advise the Israelites to attack. The scene continues to unfold in Numbers chapter 14.

Read Numbers 14:1-19.

1 That night all the people of the community raised their voices and wept aloud. 2 All the Israelites grumbled against Moses and Aaron, and the whole assembly said to them, “If only we had died in Egypt! Or in this desert! 3 Why is the LORD bringing us to this land only to let us fall by the sword? Our wives and children will be taken as plunder. Wouldn’t it be better for us to go back to Egypt?” 4 And they said to each other, “We should choose a leader and go back to Egypt.” 5 Then Moses and Aaron fell facedown in front of the whole Israelite assembly gather there. 6 Joshua and Caleb, who were among those who had explored the land, tore their clothes 7 and said to the entire Israelite assembly, “The land we passed through and explored is exceedingly good. 8 If the LORD is pleased with us, he will lead us into that land, a land flowing with milk and honey, and will give it to us. 9 Only do not rebel against the LORD. And do not be afraid of the people in the land, because we will swallow them up. Their protection is gone, but the LORD is with us. Do not be afraid of them.” 10 But the whole assembly talked about stoning them. Then the glory of the LORD appeared to all the Israelites. 11 The LORD said to Moses, “How long will these people treat me with contempt? How long will they refuse to believe in me, in spite of all the miraculous signs I have performed among them? 12 I will strike them down with a plague and destroy them, but I will make you into a nation great and stronger than they.” 13 Moses said to the LORD, “Then they Egyptians will hear about it! By your power you brought these people up from among them. 14 And they will tell the inhabitants of this land about it. They have already heard that you, O LORD, are with these people and that you, O LORD, have been seen face to face, that your cloud stays over them, and that you go before them in a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. 15 If you put these people to death all at one time, the nations who have heard this report about you will say, 16 ‘The LORD was not able to bring these people into the land he promised them on oath; so he slaughtered them in the desert.’ 17 Now may the LORD’s strength by displayed, just as you have declared: 18 ‘The LORD is slow to anger, abounding in love and forgiving sin and rebellion. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation.’ 19 In accordance with your great love, forgive the sin of these people, just as you have pardoned them from the time they left Egypt until now.”

• (vv.2-4) Who are the Israelites first concerned with? Themselves and their own needs or God and His promises?
• (v.5) What do Moses and Aaron do in reply to the Israelite’s demands? Would you have done the same if you were in their shoes? Remember that Moses is God’s chosen instrument. He spoke to Him in a burning bush! Through Moses God parted the Red Sea! Moses had all the credentials to merit standing up for himself, his track record screamed authority. How much more surprising is his choice of action when seen in this light?
Sermon-Based Small Group Leader’s Discussion Guide

- (vv. 7-9) Who does Joshua continually cite in his reply to the Israelites? Does he cite Moses and how he has not yet lead them astray? Does he cite himself and his abilities as a scout? Or does he continually and unabashedly cite the LORD?
- (v. 12) What does God offer Moses in this verse?
- (vv. 13-19) What does Moses say in response to God’s offer? For what reasons does Moses give his reply (vv. 13-17, because he is first focused on God and His glory before he is focused on himself and his own glory. He is not only concerned that the Israelites know God’s glory, but that the whole world knows God’s glory!)?
- (v. 13-19) Moses was offered to become the father of a new nation, his own nation. He turned it down because he cared more about God’s name than his own name. Moses had radical humility. Read the epilogue that God put in the Bible for Moses in Deuteronomy 34:10-12. How did Moses’ incredible focus on God-esteem over Self-esteem contribute to such an amazing summary of his life?
- There is another example of radical God-esteem over Self-esteem in Matthew 4:1-11 when Jesus is being tempted by Satan. Have someone read verses 6-10, keeping in mind how Satan is appealing to Jesus’ self-esteem as he tries to tempt Jesus. How is this incredible humility of Jesus central to his entire life and mission? (In case no one brings it up, make sure Philippians 2:6-8 is mentioned. If Jesus doesn’t value God-esteem over Self-esteem, if He doesn’t value humility over pride, He doesn’t come to earth or die on the cross!) If it is central to the life and mission of Jesus, how much more central should it be to us?

MINISTRY APPLICATION

Below you’ll see some options for ministry time with your group. We always encourage you to reserve time in your group to pray for one another and wait on the Holy Spirit.

- Ask the LORD to reveal areas in your life or heart in which Self-esteem rules. Ask God to humble you and teach you what it means to have God-esteem rule in those areas of your life.
- Perhaps as you looked at this text, you were convicted of using your gifts for Self-esteem instead of God-esteem. Humbly approach the LORD in repentance, and ask Him to show you what it would look like for you to use those gifts as He means you to use them: For the benefit of the Beloved Community, not for the benefit of yourself.
- Perhaps you have been tempted to use ‘boycotting as an end’ instead of as a means for reconciliation. Instead of being focused on the creation of the Beloved Community, you have been focused on the thrill of ‘defeating your enemies.’ Ask the LORD to show you what steps you need to take in order to begin building the Beloved Community in that area of your life, and ask Him to do the work in your heart necessary to make that a reality.
• Maybe you are struggling with determining your gifting, or struggling to find arenas that you can employ or practice your gifts in. Pastor Rich told us this weekend that our gifts are the areas of our lives that God gives us grace in (remember the clip from this weekend of Fred Astaire dancing?). Pray for the Spirit to guide you into opportunities to practice gifting and that you would be open to practicing it in a situation you wouldn’t have envisioned or chosen for yourself. Also, ask the Spirit to help you slow down enough to really take stock of the areas in your life that God has given you extravagant grace.