

Worshipping our Priorities or Prioritizing Worship

Luke 14:16-24

Friends some of you may know that when I was a teenager I was the lead rapper in a Christian Hip-Hop group called Hi-Priority.

We called ourselves “HI-Priority” because this name reflected our goal as a group to evangelize our friends, both Christian and non-Christian, and urge them to make Jesus Christ a “high priority” in their lives.

Now if you spend any time around teenagers or if you remember back to when you were a teen, you know that teenage priorities are often very different from what adult priorities are... and usually developing a relationship with Jesus usually isn't at the top of that list.

When I was a teenager my priorities were hanging out with my friends, going skateboarding, and snowboarding, making hip-hop music, working at McDonalds to earn money, and of course trying to look cool to impress the girls.

These were the things towards which I devoted my time, my energies, my attention, my affection, and my money.

Now last week we learned that the bible teaches us that worship is our response to God's actions. So that essentially all that we do each day – technically can be considered worship.

Have you ever noticed how easy it is to abuse the truth?

I mean technically I was responding to things that God had created and given to me – but they were my high priorities not my relationship with Christ.

These good things had become god things for me because they occupied my heart – I was worshipping my priorities.

Now my parents wished that I would make schoolwork and getting good grades a higher priority but that wasn't happening. They also wished that I would make developing my relationship with Christ a higher priority – but I wasn't interested at that point.

And friends that's the thing about priorities – we make them, we choose them, we allow them to be priorities.

There may be things which in the big scheme of things aren't really very important... but we've made them a priority - and conversely there can be things which are very important, extremely important - but for some reason we don't make them a priority for ourselves.

So what determines our priorities?

Personal tastes, interests, and certainly our context or stage of life – for example its expected that teenagers will make impressing members of the opposite sex a priority – that's part of the stage of life they are in.

But when you are an adult, and engaged and married – flirting with others become much less of a priority – I hope.

So we see that priorities can change – and that can happen gradually as you mature or suddenly if your context changes suddenly and that's what happened to me.

When I was sixteen I was involved in a motorbike accident – and suddenly I wasn't able to focus on everything that was a priority for me. God used this accident and my injuries to force me to begin to evaluate and question what I had been making my priorities.

I realized that it was time for me to make a relationship with Jesus Christ and telling other people about that relationship a high priority in my life – the highest priority in my life, and what used to be priority for me became the means I started to use to express and share my faith.

Unfortunately even though I had spiritually matured quite a bit, I was still emotionally and physically somewhat immature and so much to my parents frustration my relationship with Christ didn't mean that I made my schoolwork more of a priority...

Now friends – this principle works the other way around too... you can be physically and emotionally mature as an adult but still be spiritually immature and that will be reflected in what you prioritize.

Your priorities will reflect your physical and emotional maturity –for example you’ll treat others nicely, you will love your spouse and your kids, you’ll work hard and provide for your family.

You’ll take care of your health, spend your money wisely and make good investments for retirement...all good priorities.

But if our spiritual maturity has not kept pace with our physical and emotionally maturity... friends we will end up worshipping our priorities instead of prioritizing worship – and that will inevitably lead to our neglecting the our most important relationship of our life, the relationship that gives us life – our relationship with Jesus Christ.

And this can be somewhat of a catch 22.

Because we need spiritual maturity to prioritize worship instead and gather with the body of Christ on Sundays instead of worshipping priorities and allowing other priorities to take us away from that....

But that spiritual maturity we need usually comes from regularly participating in Sunday worship... a catch 22

Something needs to happen to us to break that cycle, to force us to change, to give us a boost of spiritual maturity we need to prioritize worship.

That something is Christ’s grace and mercy and the Holy Spirit’s power interrupting our lives.

For me that grace and mercy and power came through my motorbike accident – it caused me to reprioritize things.

For others it might be a sickness, loss of a job, the loss of a loved one, some sort of disaster or catastrophe...

As Hebrews 12 says “*do not make light of God’s discipline for he disciplines those whom he loves, it’s not pleasant at the time but later it produces a harvest of righteousness....spiritual maturity.*”

Now I wish it could be different – I wish that we could see how attractive a relationship with Christ is, how wonderful and fulfilling spending our time and energies on developing that relationship will be, and that the attraction would be enough to have us make it a priority – and perhaps at first it was.

Like the proverbial guy who sees the girl, and falls head over heels in love, and gets married. But then he starts his career and becomes consumed by it – and ends up neglecting his marriage.

And when this is the case friends it doesn't matter how attractive his wife is, how much she tries to get his attention or what she does to try to get his attention, he just doesn't see it because his eyes and his heart have a different focus, a different set of priorities.

It usually takes a hard reality check for him to come to the realization that he could lose what he takes for granted to bring about a change of heart.

So friends, I pray that the parable of the Great Banquet will do this for us if we have inadvertently slipped into the place in life where we are allowing good things to cause us to miss making Sunday worship a priority.

The parable of the Great Banquet is a story about a wealthy man who has prepared an amazing feast and party for some guests. Everything is ready and so He sends his servants out to gather those who have been invited to come and enjoy what He has prepared for them.

Friends, this is like Sunday worship – God has prepared to meet with you and the rest of your fellow believers – to have you come into his presence and enjoy being with Him.

So he sends out the invitation, the call to come and party with Him – He is requesting your presence at His banquet – you, specifically and personally... He wants you there, and you and you and you and you...

Friends this invitation goes out to everyone – Psalm 19:1-4 describes how we receive this invitation in reality...

The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands. Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they display knowledge. There is no speech or language where their voice is not heard. Their voice goes out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world.

The creation is God's messenger calling us to worship Him – we all see it and hear it, all week long - it's not like we didn't get an invitation.

But how do we respond to that invitation?

Do we prioritize worship or do we have an excuse as to why we “can't” that will reveal we are worshiping our priorities instead like the guests in the parable.

Why can't the guests in the parable go to the banquet?

The first one says - I can't... because I just bought a field and I have to go see it,

The next one says – I can't... because I just bought some oxen and I have to go try them out.

What lame excuses friends, nobody buys a field without first looking at it, and nobody buys livestock without first trying them out.

It's like getting the old “*umm yeah...I've got to wash my hair tonight*” line when you've asked someone out on a date.

These guests are blowing off all the hard work, energy and effort that the Host has spent preparing special something for them - simply because they are not interested – it's not a priority for them, the person who is inviting them is not a priority for them!

And when we read about it in this story we can see how ungrateful that looks.

But it's not so easy to see it happening when we're doing it is it? We forget who it is that is inviting us to come into His presence, to spend time with Him, to listen to Him

It's God...the creator of the universe, a being who transcends space and time and is all powerful, all knowing and all present!

But yeah, you see Sundays I like to sleep in... Sundays I can take that extra time to get stuff done around the house...

Sundays I spend time with my family, my kids - so thanks anyways but "I can't"

Friends, lets be careful we don't blow God off!

Now the next excuse might seem a bit more legitimate – "I've just got married, so I can't come!"

Perhaps the invitation for the banquet came as the young groom is preparing to leave with his bride on their honeymoon. We might also wonder why the host planned a banquet when his guest was getting married.

However wedding customs went in those days meant you wouldn't have found this man outside and been able to invite him if it was anytime close to the wedding ceremony.

In ancient Jewish weddings the couple went straight from the ceremony to the honeymoon suite close nearby – no cruises on the Jordan river or the sea of Gallilee – the honeymoon was spending the whole week together indoors together.

Then they came out and the celebrating and the feasting began.

So this invitation is really an opportunity for this young man to double the celebration of his marriage. Why doesn't he say, "I just got married, let me bring the whole wedding party and let's continue celebrating!"

It would be like having the option to upgrade your wedding reception dinner from a buffet to fine dining – a five course meal cooked by a top chef with all you can eat and drink for free! Why wouldn't you do this?

Friends the question this excuse leaves us with is "Why don't we bring some of our priorities to worship?" Christ would love to hear us share about the great things going on in our lives, the blessings he has given us. He wants to hear about what we've accomplished and He especially wants to know about the

concerns we have for our priorities, where we need help, encouragement, and support – and the rest of us do to, that’s what builds spiritual community.

That’s why the Apostle Paul says in 1 Corinthians 12:26-27

*If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it. Now you are the body of Christ, **and each one of you is a part of it.***

So friends – what excuses do we have as to why “we can’t” make Sunday worship a priority? As to why we don’t bring our priorities to Sunday worship?

Do we realize what the consequences are for making excuses?

We see them outlined for us in this story. The Host becomes angry when His generosity and hard work and graciousness is snubbed.

Those people who were originally invited do not get a second chance to reconsider the invitation, the Host tells his

messengers to give their place to other people and they end up missing out on the banquet.

Now friends Jesus first told this story to warn the Jews of his day that their refusal to recognize and acknowledge Him as the promised messiah was going to have them missing out on being a part of the Kingdom of God.

Now as we apply it to making Sunday worship a priority please don’t misunderstand me – We’re not applying this legalistically to make you think that missing a Sunday here means no second chances, God is angry with you and zap you are out of the Kingdom of God.

We want it to speak to our hearts and hear the warning that if we don’t make responding to God’s invitation to us a weekly priority....

Then we’re gradually starting to go down that slippery slope of indifference. And it becomes easier and easier to put off Sunday worship promising that we’ll go some time when we’re

free – and maybe we do... occasionally... sporadically...at Christmas and Easter....

And eventually we've joined the ranks of those people – who like the Jews of Jesus day – don't recognize Jesus anymore, people who are indifferent to Him – and the tragedy is that this indifference will prove to be our undoing when Christ returns and we must give an account for how we responded to his invitation to worship Him.

Hopefully that realization shakes us awake and causes us to reexamine our priorities – to ask ourselves if we prioritize worship or if our excuses as to why we “can't” make it out mean we're worshipping our priorities.

So let's get practical with this...

What if we need to reprioritize Sunday worship? The good news friends, is that Christ is full of grace and mercy and He always welcomes us back – forgiving us for ignoring Him.

What if we need some more help – the spirit is willing but our follow through may be weak. Friends ask someone at church to hold you accountable. Say I'm planning on coming but call me Sat night to make sure I'm going to follow through, and don't let me make any excuses! Call me Sunday afternoon if I didn't show up and ask what happened.

Maybe you need something here at church? – Let us know what we can do to help you out so that you can bring your priorities with you to church. Do you need childcare? Physical assistance? Do you need to share your burdens, receive prayer ministry, are you looking for community, or help with a problem. Perhaps you need to know how you can contribute, how you can be involved. Let us know.

Maybe your life circumstances prevent you from being here regularly - Friends, I will admit that sometimes God has a calling on our lives which means that we can't be here on Sunday morning - we need to travel to do the work he has given us, to steward the business and the resources that belong to him.

If that's the case – you're in luck – the church exists in every corner of this world and on any given Sunday morning millions of people all across the planet are worshipping Jesus Christ – so if you can't be here - make an effort to join in with them.

Or at the very least turn your hotel room into a church for an hour – worship God by reading the bible, praying, even singing some songs – nobody will hear you, or know you if they do☺

Turn on the TV and catch a service that's broadcast from somewhere – but make time to worship when you have to be away from your home church here at Valleyview.

But what if “worship” isn't doing it for you? The music, the setting, the people, the minister's preaching☺ its just not really connecting with you, not inspiring you as you like you want it to.

Well I'd say it' kind of like this – you see I'm not a big supporter of the Liberal party, and I don't particularly like turn of the century classical architecture, formal dinner attire, and formal dinning. Fine cuisine is usually tasty – but there's never

enough of it... however in spite of my personal tastes do you think I would turn down an invitation to have dinner with Jean Chrétien, Prime Minister of Canada at 24 Sussex Drive? Would you?

Friends, coming to worship Christ on Sunday morning is the same kind of situation! The significance of being able to come and spend an hour with your Creator should overwhelm any personal preferences we may have about the experience because of who are worshiping and the opportunity we have to be in His presence.

It's about Christ – not us friends...

So let's come before Him now – let's invite the Holy Spirit to work in us, work among us, to convict us where we need convicting, encourage us where we need encouraging, and empower us with spiritual maturity so we can prioritize Sunday worship!

Let's pray.