

Isaiah 58:1-12
June 25, '17

“HAUGHTY EYES”

(Before Scripture)

THERE ARE AT LEAST TWO APPROACHES TO SERMON PREPARATION.

THE FIRST AND PREFERRED METHOD – THE METHOD THAT IS ORDINARILY FOLLOWED HERE AT EASTMINSTER – IS TO SELECT A PASSAGE OF SCRIPTURE FOR THE DAY’S FOCUS (USUALLY FROM THE THREE-YEAR COMMON LECTIONARY) & THEN, THROUGH PRAYER & STUDY, DETERMINE WHERE THAT PASSAGE LEADS US IN UNDERSTANDING A PARTICULAR MESSAGE FOR A PARTICULAR PEOPLE. THE SECOND METHOD IS REALLY MUCH EASIER.

IN THIS METHOD, ONE FIRST DETERMINES A DIRECTION –AND THEN SEARCHES FOR BIBLICAL PASSAGES THAT WILL *SUPPORT* THAT DIRECTION.

THAT’S COMMONLY REFERRED TO AS “PROOF-TEXTING” – FIGURING OUT WHAT YOU THINK GOD WANTS PEOPLE TO HEAR & THEN SEARCHING FOR BIBLICAL PASSAGES THAT BACK IT UP.

IT’S NOT A METHOD I PREFER BUT I THINK, WITH CARE & PRAYER, IT CAN BE DONE WITH INTEGRITY.

IT’S THAT SECOND METHOD WE’LL BE USING WITH THIS SUMMER SERIES THAT FOCUSES ON 4 BOOKS, 4 MOVIES & 4 SONGS THAT PROCLAIM A CHRISTIAN MESSAGE WITHOUT NECESSARILY BEING OVERTLY CHRISTIAN.

THAT BEING SAID, ONE OF THE MOST DIFFICULT PARTS OF PREPARING *THIS* SERMON WAS NOT FINDING SCRIPTURAL SUPPORT

TO BACK UP THE DIRECTION I INTENDED TO GO, BUT DECIDING BETWEEN LITERALLY DOZENS UPON DOZENS OF EXCELLENT OPTIONS!

THE REASON THERE ARE SO MANY OPTIONS IS BECAUSE THE BOOK WE'LL BE LOOKING AT TODAY FOCUSES ON THE IDEA OF CARING FOR OTHERS AS A SIGNIFICANT COMPONENT OF OUR CHRISTIAN FAITH.

THAT THEME OBVIOUSLY IS FOUND IN A WHOLE LOT OF BIBLICAL PASSAGES.

THE ONE I'VE CHOSEN IS FROM THE PROPHET ISAIAH.

IT'S FOUND IN THE SECTION OF THE BOOK KNOWN AS SECOND OR EVEN THIRD ISAIAH AND IS A PROPHETIC WORD TO THOSE WHO HAD BEEN LIVING IN EXILE WHO HAVE BEEN ALLOWED TO RETURN HOME TO ISRAEL.

IT'S REALLY A CONVERSATION BETWEEN GOD, THE PROPHET & THE PEOPLE.

WE'RE READING THE FIRST 12 VERSES OF THE 58TH CHAPTER OF ISAIAH – ISAIAH 58:1-12.

(After Scripture)

MIKE WAS A COLLEGE STUDENT.

HE DROVE ACROSS TOWN ONE SUNDAY MORNING TO GO TO CHURCH.

THE SERMON HE HEARD THAT MORNING WOULD CHANGE HIS LIFE FOREVER.

HE SAID, "... I HAD JUST DRIVEN 20 MINUTES PAST THE WORLD THAT NEEDED ME TO BE THE CHRISTIAN I SAY I AM, IN ORDER TO

HEAR A SERMON ENTITLED, ‘BE THE CHRISTIAN YOU SAY YOU ARE.’

SOON I WOULD DRIVE BACK PAST THAT SAME WORLD TO THE PRIVILEGE OF MY COMFORTABLE LIFE ON CAMPUS AT A CHRISTIAN COLLEGE.”

WHEN I READ THOSE WORDS NEAR THE BEGINNING OF MIKE YANKOSKI’S BOOK UNDER THE OVERPASS, I COULDN’T HELP BUT MARVEL AT A LIFE CHANGED BECAUSE OF A SERMON.

I SUPPOSE IF PRESSED, SOMEONE WHO HAS WORSHIPPED HERE RECENTLY MIGHT SAY THEY DECIDED TO VISIT WILLARD LIBRARY OR LISTEN TO SOME DAVID BAILEY MUSIC BECAUSE OF SOMETHING THEY HEARD FROM THIS PULPIT, BUT I DON’T THINK LIVES HAVE BEEN CHANGED BECAUSE OF A SERMON PREACHED HERE.

AND THAT’S ON ME, NOT YOU.

THE SERMON MIKE YANKOSKI HEARD THAT DAY GRABBED HOLD OF HIM AND HE SAID, “*THE IDEA CAME INSTANTLY – LIKE THE FLASH OF A CAMERA OR A FLICKER OF LIGHTNING. IT LEFT ME BREATHLESS, AND IT CHANGED MY LIFE.*”

WHAT IF I STEPPED OUT OF MY COMFORTABLE LIFE WITH NOTHING BUT GOD AND PUT MY FAITH TO THE TEST ALONGSIDE OF THOSE WHO LIVE WITH NOTHING EVERY DAY?

THE PICTURE THAT CAME WITH THAT QUESTION WAS OF ME HOMELESS AND HUNGRY ON THE STREETS OF AN AMERICAN CITY.”

MIKE’S BOOK CHRONICLES HIS FIVE MONTH EXPERIENCE OF INTENTIONAL HOMELESSNESS IN FIVE CITIES ACROSS AMERICA.

A FRIEND JOINED HIM IN THE EXPERIENCE & IT SIGNIFICANTLY ALTERED HIS OUTLOOK ON LIFE AND HIS OUTLOOK ON PEOPLE.

I DON'T THINK HIS MESSAGE NEEDS TO BE CONFINED TO THE WAY WE LOOK AT THOSE WHO ARE HOMELESS.

IT'S A MESSAGE THAT'S MUCH BROADER THAN THAT.

IT'S A MESSAGE THAT'S PROCLAIMED LOUDLY IN THIS PASSAGE WE'VE READ FROM ISAIAH THIS MORNING.

THE PEOPLE DON'T UNDERSTAND WHY GOD DOESN'T HEAR THEM IN THEIR PLEAS.

AFTER ALL, THEY'RE DOING ALL THE THINGS THEY THINK THEY'RE SUPPOSED TO BE DOING.

THEY PRAY.

THEY WORSHIP.

ABOVE ALL, THEY FAST.

THEY SHOW GOD HOW HOLY THEY ARE IN THEIR PRAYERS, THEIR WORSHIP & THEIR FASTS.

AND GOD TELLS THEM THEY JUST DON'T GET IT.

WHAT GOD DESIRES IS NOT A FAST FROM *FOOD* BUT RATHER A FAST FROM *INJUSTICE & OPPRESSION*.

GOD, THROUGH THE MOUTH OF THE PROPHET SAYS, "*IS NOT THIS THE FAST THAT I CHOOSE: TO LOOSE THE BONDS OF INJUSTICE...AND TO LET THE OPPRESSED GO FREE?*"

IS IT NOT TO SHARE YOUR BREAD WITH THE HUNGRY, AND BRING THE HOMELESS POOR INTO YOUR HOUSE; WHEN YOU SEE THE NAKED, TO COVER THEM...?"

GOD WANTS US TO FAST FROM OUR AFFLUENCE.

YOU SEE, THAT’S WHY I SAID THAT WE COULD HAVE CHOSEN FROM LITERALLY DOZENS & DOZENS OF OPTIONS WHEN LOOKING FOR PASSAGES THAT SUPPORT THE MESSAGE OF CARING FOR OTHERS THAT IS FOUND IN MIKE YANKOSKI’S UNDER THE OVERPASS BOOK.

ALL THROUGH THE BIBLE – FROM GENESIS TO REVELATION – THIS IS THE CALL & CLAIM OF GOD UPON OUR LIVES.

AND I THINK GOD WOULD SAY TO US – AS HE SAID TO THE PEOPLE RETURNING TO ISRAEL AFTER THE EXILE – “*YOU JUST DON’T GET IT!*”

THAT WAS THE MESSAGE THAT GRABBED HOLD OF MIKE YANKOSKI AS HE SAT IN WORSHIP THAT MORNING & HEARD THE CHALLENGE TO “*BE THE CHRISTIAN YOU SAY YOU ARE!*”

AS HE SHARES HIS EXPERIENCES ON THE STREETS OF AMERICA, I HAVE TO ADMIT THAT MUCH OF WHAT HE SAYS MAKES ME VERY UNCOMFORTABLE.

HE MADE ME SQUIRM.

HE MADE ME REALIZE THAT, IN MANY WAYS, I’M THE PERSON HE’S TALKING ABOUT WHEN HE SHARES ENCOUNTERS WITH CHRISTIANS WHO MADE HIM FEEL AS THOUGH HE WASN’T WORTH THEIR TIME OR THEIR CARE.

HE PUTS A FACE ON THOSE WHO LIVE IN HOMELESSNESS & THE UNBELIEVABLE CONDITIONS THEY’RE FORCED TO ENDURE WHICH SHOULD LEAVE NO DOUBT ABOUT WHETHER OR NOT SOMEONE ACTUALLY “CHOOSES” TO LIVE AS HOMELESS.

A TYPICAL NIGHT WOULD INCLUDE FINDING A PLACE TO THROW DOWN HIS SLEEPING BAG WHERE HE WOULDN'T BE ATTACKED BY ROACHES & RATS.

AS CHRISTIANS, MIKE & HIS HOMELESS COMPANION, SAM, WOULD ALWAYS LOOK FOR A CHURCH FOR SUNDAY MORNING WORSHIP.

THEIR ENCOUNTERS WITH CHURCH FOLKS LEFT THEM ASTOUNDED AT THE INSENSITIVITY & DOWNRIGHT CRUELTY THEY EXPERIENCED.

HERE, IN MIKE'S WORDS, IS ONE OF THOSE EXPERIENCES THAT MADE ME SQUIRM.

HE WRITES:

"A LARGE GRAY CHURCH ROSE UP BEHIND A WROUGHT IRON FENCE IN FRONT OF US.

THE BUILDING WAS OLD AND WEATHERED.

ABOVE THE MAHOGANY DOUBLE DOORS HUNG A SIGN IN RED LETTERS: 'NO TRESPASSING. CHURCH BUSINESS ONLY.'

A NEW CHAIN AND TWO HUGE PADLOCKS SECURED THE GATE AT THE SIDEWALK.

SUDDENLY, VERY ANGRY, I SAID, 'IT WOULD TAKE BOLT CUTTERS & A BATTERING RAM TO GET INTO THAT CHURCH.'

'COME TO ME ALL YOU WHO ARE WEARY & HEAVY LADEN?' YEAH, AND WHAT, DIE ON MY FRONT STEPS?!

SAM WAS HAVING THE SAME THOUGHTS.

HE SAID, 'LET'S SAY YOUR LIFE IS FALLING APART AND YOU NEED HELP. WOULD YOU WANT TO GO THERE?'

‘NOPE,’ I SAID. ‘ANYWHERE BUT THERE. BUT THE WORLD IS THE CHURCH’S BUSINESS – AND THAT’S EXACTLY WHO THEY’RE SHUTTING OUT.’

WE WALKED PAST A MARKET THAT SOLD POP, BEER, WINE, CIGARETTES, PORNOGRAPHY. THE DOORS WERE WEDGED OPEN. RAGGED PEOPLE CAME AND WENT.

IT WAS ONE OF THE PLACES THAT NEVER CLOSE.”

WHEN YOU HEAR THAT, PERHAPS THE FIRST WORD THAT COMES TO YOUR MIND IS THE FIRST WORD THAT CAME TO MINE.

“BUT...”

“BUT WHAT ABOUT...”

“BUT YOU HAVE TO UNDERSTAND...”

YES, WE KNOW ALL THE REASONS WE CAN OFFER TO DEFEND THAT CHURCH & OURS AS WELL.

BUT THE FACT REMAINS - THAT EXPERIENCE THAT MIKE & SAM HAD IS ONE OF THE THINGS ABOUT THIS BOOK THAT MADE ME SQUIRM.

AND HERE’S WHERE I THINK ANOTHER PASSAGE CAN HELP US LOOK BEYOND JUST THE ISSUE OF HOMELESSNESS & SEE A MUCH BROADER PICTURE & A MUCH BIGGER PROBLEM.

I THINK WE CAN ALSO SEE A WAY TO EFFECTIVELY DEAL WITH THE PROBLEM.

THERE’S A PHRASE THAT OCCURS IN SEVERAL DIFFERENT OLD TESTAMENT PASSAGES THAT MAY HELP US GET TO THE REAL ROOT OF THE ISSUE WE’RE DEALING WITH HERE.

FIRST OF ALL, IF YOU WERE ASKED TO NAME THINGS THAT GOD HATES, WHAT WOULD THOSE THINGS BE & HOW WOULD YOU RANK THEM AS MOST HATED BY GOD?

MURDER? BLASPHEMY? IDOLATRY?

IN THE SIXTH CHAPTER OF PROVERBS, THE WRITER SAYS *“THERE ARE SIX THINGS THE LORD HATES...THINGS THAT ARE DETESTABLE TO HIM.”*

THE FIRST THING LISTED – THAT WHICH IS AT THE VERY TOP OF THE LIST OF DETESTABLE THINGS THAT GOD HATES - IS WHAT THE WRITER CALLS “HAUGHTY EYES.”

THE NUMBER ONE SIN THAT YOU & I SHOULD SEEK TO AVOID IS HAVING “HAUGHTY EYES.”

HAUGHTY.

THAT’S NOT A WORD WE USE VERY OFTEN, IS IT?

WE KNOW WHAT IT MEANS, THOUGH.

IT REFERS TO PRIDE, ARROGANCE, CONCEIT.

“HAUGHTY EYES” ARE EYES THAT LOOK AT ANOTHER PERSON WITH ARROGANT SUPERIORITY & DISDAIN.

PRIDE IS AT THE VERY TOP OF GOD’S LIST OF SINS.

IT’S THE SIN THAT LIES AT THE BOTTOM – AT THE ROOT – OF ALL OTHERS.

C.S. LEWIS SPEAKS SO POWERFULLY ABOUT PRIDE WHEN HE SAYS, *“THE ESSENTIAL VICE, THE UTMOST EVIL, IS PRIDE.*

UNCHASTITY, ANGER, GREED, DRUNKENNESS, AND ALL THAT, ARE MERE FLEABITES IN COMPARISON. IT WAS THROUGH PRIDE THAT THE DEVIL BECAME THE DEVIL. PRIDE LEADS TO EVERY OTHER VICE & IS THE COMPLETE ANTI-GOD STATE OF MIND.”

AND YET, IRONICALLY, WE LIVE IN AN AGE & IN A SOCIETY WHERE PRIDE & SELF-ESTEEM ARE LOOKED UPON AS POSITIVE QUALITIES!

IT SOUNDS COUNTERINTUITIVE TO US TO SUGGEST THAT WE SHOULD HATE PRIDE IN THE SAME WAY THAT GOD DOES!

AND I THINK THE FACT THAT WE CAN'T EVEN ADMIT THAT PRIDE IS A SIN IS A HUGE PART OF THE PROBLEM!

THINK ABOUT IT – LIKE YOU, I HEAR A SONG LIKE “*I’M PROUD TO BE AN AMERICAN*” AND IT BRINGS A TEAR TO MY EYES.

IRONICALLY, I HAVE NO DOUBT THAT IT BRINGS A TEAR TO GOD’S EYES AS WELL – BUT FOR A VERY DIFFERENT REASON!

AND AGAIN, THE FIRST WORD THAT COMES TO YOUR MIND IS – “*BUT*” AND YOU WANT TO VIGOROUSLY DISAGREE.

BUT YOUR DISAGREEMENT ISN’T WITH ME – IT’S WITH THE PROPHET ISAIAH AND, THEREFORE, WITH THE WORD OF GOD.

LET’S GO BACK TO MIKE YANKOSKI’S EXPERIENCES ON THE STREETS OF AMERICA.

HE TALKS ABOUT A TIME THAT HE & SAM WERE SITTING ON THE GROUND NEXT TO A SIDEWALK.

A FAMILY WALKED PAST – A MAN & WIFE WITH THEIR TWO YOUNG CHILDREN – THE YOUNGEST A LITTLE BOY IN A STROLLER.

THE MOM & DAD LOOKED STRAIGHT AHEAD, AVOIDING ANY LOOK AT ALL AT SAM & MIKE SITTING ON THE GROUND, AS IF THEY WEREN’T EVEN THERE.

THE CHILDREN, THOUGH, BEING AT EYE LEVEL WITH WHERE MIKE & SAM SAT, GAZED AT THEM WITH INTEREST & INTENSITY.

IN REFLECTING ON THAT EXPERIENCE, MIKE SAID, “CHILDREN HAVEN’T YET LEARNED TO IGNORE WHAT THEY SEE, SO THEY CAN ACTUALLY TAKE IN THE WORLD AS IT IS.”

AND THEN HE SAYS THIS - A LINE THAT MAY BE MY FAVORITE LINE IN THE ENTIRE BOOK – “WHILE KIDS MIGHT PRETEND PEOPLE WHO DON’T EXIST DO, IT’S THE PARENTS WHO PRETEND THAT UNWANTED PEOPLE WHO DO EXIST, DON’T.”

MIKE SAID THE FURTHER THE FAMILY WALKED AWAY, THE FURTHER THE LITTLE BOY IN THE STROLLER LEANED OUT TO LOOK AT HIM WITH A STEADY GAZE AND A BROAD SMILE.

IT WAS A GIFT FROM THAT CHILD THAT HE WOULD NEVER FORGET.

IN ESSENCE, THAT CHILD NOTICED HIM & GAVE HIM DIGNITY SIMPLY BY SEEING HIM & SHARING A SMILE WITH HIM.

THAT, TO ME, IS THE MOST POWERFUL MESSAGE OF THIS BOOK.

DO WE CARE ENOUGH ABOUT OTHERS TO SEE THEM, TO ACKNOWLEDGE THEIR EXISTENCE, TO RECOGNIZE THEM AS A DIVINE CREATURE WITH TREMENDOUS WORTH & VALUE IN THE EYES OF GOD?

AS HE REFLECTED ON THE HARDSHIPS HE ENCOUNTERED IN BEING HOMELESS, MIKE SAID THIS WAS THE HARDEST THING TO ENDURE.

EVERY TIME HE WAS LOOKED AT WITH REVULSION AND DISGUST, EVERY TIME HE WAS IGNORED, RIDICULED OR REJECTED, A BIT MORE OF HIS DIGNITY WAS STRIPPED AWAY.

EVERY DAY HE EXPERIENCED THOSE “HAUGHTY EYES” THAT LOOKED UPON HIM WITH AN ATTITUDE OF SUPERIORITY AND AN AIR OF DISDAIN.

IT’S NOT JUST THOSE WHO ARE HOMELESS.

WE TEND TO LOOK WITH SKEPTICISM UPON ANYONE WHO’S DIFFERENT FROM US.

IT’S OUR PRIDE THAT LEADS US TO DO THAT – PRIDE THAT SAYS (EVEN SUBCONSCIOUSLY & UNINTENTIONALLY) – “*THAT PERSON ISN’T REALLY WORTHY OF MY AFFECTION OR MY ATTENTION.*”

THAT MAKES ME SQUIRM.

IT MAKES ME SQUIRM TO RECOGNIZE THAT, ALL TOO OFTEN, THAT’S MY ATTITUDE.

AS MUCH AS I’D LIKE TO DENY IT, I CAN’T.

BUT I HOPE THAT BY RECOGNIZING IT & ACCEPTING MY COMPLICITY IN LOOKING AT OTHERS WITH “HAUGHTY EYES,” I CAN BEGIN TO CHANGE.

I SHARED MY FAVORITE LINE IN MIKE YANKOSKI’S BOOK.

LET ME CLOSE WITH ONE THAT’S A CLOSE SECOND.

HE SAYS, “*WE DON’T GO TO CHURCH. WE ARE THE CHURCH. THE CHURCH ISN’T A PHYSICAL BUILDING OR A DOCTRINAL STATEMENT OR A PERFECTLY PRODUCED PROGRAM.*”

IT IS US – WE ARE THE LIVING EXPRESSION OF CHRIST’S PRESENCE IN THE WORLD, HIS BODY.

***THE SOONER WE REALIZE THAT, THE SOONER WE’LL BE ABLE TO BE THE HEALING BODY OF CHRIST IN THIS SIN-SICK WORLD.*”**

ADMITTEDLY, THOUGH, MAYBE THE BEST LINE OF THE BOOK IS THE ONE THAT DROVE MIKE YANKOSKI TO THE STREETS OF AMERICA & THE LINE THAT CHANGED HIS LIFE.

MAYBE IT'S A LINE FOR ALL OF US TO CONSIDER: "*BE THE CHRISTIAN YOU SAY YOU ARE.*" AMEN.

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