

How Can We Be The People of God?" Jesus and Servanthood

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Texts: Isaiah 42: 1-6 and Matthew 3: 13-17.

Introduction: Series on "How Can We Be The People of God?"

A. **Previously**, we examined the question of "How Can We Be The People of God?" by looking at the four major sects of Judaism during the time of Jesus and the early church. In so doing we studied the response of Jesus to each one, and then looked for contemporary groups who took similar approaches.

1. Pharisees – legalists
2. Sadducees – collaborationists with Rome
3. Zealots – militaristic theocrats
4. Essenes – separatists (the only group that Jesus did not openly

condemn)

B. By studying the groups we **determined what not to do** in trying to be God's people in the 21st century.

C. Today, and in the fifth sermon on this topic, I want us to look from a **more positive** perspective. We will ask the question "what can we learn from the life and the teachings of Jesus that will help us to be God's people today?" This morning we will look at events in the life of Jesus and at His teaching that point us to a servant model for being the people of God.

I. **Who was Jesus?** -

Names and terms used to describe Jesus - Lamb of God, bread of life, light of the world, son of God, son of Man, the vine, prophet, priest, king, etc. Two titles stand out in terms of usage – both are OT concepts.

Baptism/Transfiguration - "This is my beloved son in Whom I am well-pleased." - Combination of two OT concepts concerning a future leader of God's people - the Messiah and the Suffering Servant.

[Transfiguration was a glimpse of the glory of Jesus. His countenance changed, he appeared as white as snow. He was seen by Peter, James and John to be in the presence of Moses and Elijah, representatives of the law and the prophets, who confirmed that suffering was ahead for Jesus.

A. **Messiah** (translated *Christ* in the Greek language of the NT) - "This is my beloved son" - **Psalms 2:7** - Messianic psalm or royal psalm used for the enthronement of a king or prince.

1. Messiah – Anointed One- a political figure who would come and restore God's kingdom – Israel, in the minds of most Jews.

2. Peter's Confession at Caesarea Philippi – "You are the Christ." Note that following this, Jesus told his disciples that he would have to go to Jerusalem and suffer at the hands of the authorities. How did Peter respond? "God forbid,

this can't happen to you!" The response of Jesus was "Get behind me, Satan." Peter, who Jesus had called a rock is now a stumbling block.

B. **Suffering Servant** - "in whom I am well-pleased" - **Isaiah 42:1** - suffering servant. Found in the first of four servant songs (Isa. 42:1-6; 49: 3- 6; 50:4-9; 53: 1-12)

1. Which of the two models did Jesus most often identify?
2. 10 of the 12 verses in Isaiah 53 are applied directly to Jesus.

II. **The temptations of Jesus** – Following the baptism and the time of fasting for Jesus, the well-known temptations of Jesus help us to understand how Jesus saw himself. In a way, they again tell us **who he was not**.

A. **Stones to bread - social Messiah** - Jesus taught us to care for the poor, the hungry, the thirsty, the imprisoned, the outcasts of society. The sheep and goat judgment convey his and our concern for those whom society has neglected. But in the end being a social Messiah in order to get people to follow him was **not the primary thrust of His teachings**.

1. Rather, such concern was a **result** of one's commitment, not the primary commitment.

2. Man shall not live by bread alone but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.

3. **Feeding of the 5,000 is a good example of the understanding of Jesus in terms of his ministry - crowd wanted to make him King – apparently his apostle's were the instigators of this attitude – Jesus had to send them to the other side of the Sea of Galilee and then disperse the crowd.**

B. **Jump from the pinnacle of the Temple** (note that in Luke, 2 and 3 are reversed)- **attract people as a miracle-worker, doing the spectacular, being the entertainer.**

1. Jesus rejected this model as well. "You shall not tempt the Lord your God."

2. We live in a culture which is drawn to the spectacular, the miraculous - yet we get very bored and move on to the next act. E.g., who was the first person to walk on the moon (Apollo 11)? (Neil Armstrong). The second? (Buzz Aldrin). The third (Apollo 12)? (do you see what I mean?). Pete Conrad. The fourth, Alan Bean.

3. Sometimes, we do things that draw the attention of people. But is it lasting? Usually it is not. Keep in mind that the NT teaches that while Jesus did miracles, it was usually in response to a present faith, not to induce faith. **Jesus performed mighty works - in response to faith, not to call for faith. He did not do miracles to "prove" that he was divine, that he was God.**

C. **Offer of earthly kingdoms** - political power - we have already examined this idea both in terms of the Sadducees and the Zealots.

1. The **response** of Jesus was simple, **"You shall worship the Lord you God, and serve him only."**

2. We learn from this temptation that it is not very wise to hitch one's spiritual wagon to a political star, that's for sure.

3. **Entry into Jerusalem - many saw Jesus as the promised Messiah in a Kingly role**

These three temptations are a way to help us understand who Jesus was **not**.

D. **Garden of Gethsemane** - Jesus faced other temptations that would seek to deter him from his self-understanding.

1. Probably the most significant was in the Garden of Gethsemane, when facing the violence of arrest and even death he prayed "**Father, if there is another way, let this cup of suffering be removed**" - **three times** Jesus prayed this prayer.

2. Then he chose the way of the cross, the way of voluntary sacrifice, the path of vicarious suffering.

III. When we examine the temptations of Jesus and compare it with the way that he chose to fulfill the purpose of the father, it is obvious that his teachings and actions were consistent with the **suffering servant concept** found in Isaiah 42 and ff.

A. Jesus understood that his ministry was to be realized and fulfilled through voluntary sacrifice, through suffering, if necessary, and through being a servant to others, not holding oneself above others.

B. And by his voluntary death upon the cross, he put into practice that which he preached.

Conclusions:

A. A social ministry is consistent with the teachings of Jesus - sheep and goat judgment - but it is not the central focus

B. Many are attracted to the spectacular, the entertaining - but in the end, this may prove to be shallow. If I announced that a noon next Sunday I was going to climb to the highest part of our church building and when the clock strikes twelve, I would jump, we would gather a good crowd of people. Some would come to see me make a hit on Pine street. Others would be curious. Others simply would want to know if I really would "lightly touch down." Janis would call our insurance agent! But whatever happened, most would simply go their way and await the next big show.

C. Earthly and political power may result in short term gain, but it will not last - Christians need to be concerned about political issues and even about politicians. But when we get too close to politics and the politicians, we lose our prophetic voice. And, as I understand it from a study of the history of Christianity, in the end the politicians wind up using the believers.

D. When the bottom line has been written, we need to realize that we are here to serve, to minister - and that there is a price to be paid.

FBC throughout its history has defined and redefined its ministry. It has an admirable record of a ministry of proclaiming and living the Gospel, a teaching ministry, a wonderful missions ministry, and a social ministry. Every day when I come to the office, there is always some community group meeting here. Many of the groups are comprised of broken people needing some form of healing. Alcohol, drugs, poverty, we could go on and on. And FBC, Boulder has responded in many ways, providing a place to meet, providing resources, although the economy has taxed what we can do in this area, providing volunteers when needed.

However, the church like many downtown churches has declined in membership in recent years. This has limited our ability in terms of how we can minister and in terms of caring for our physical plant. Reductions in next year's budget in some important areas, especially in terms of music, missions, and staff, in order to continue a full time pastoral ministry has been a real challenge – and very painful to so many of us - as we seek to face the realities of the present.

At the same time there is such a wonderful spirit at FBC these days, efforts at responding to the 21st century in new and different ways, and continuation of those ministries that have defined our congregation. These ministries are also consistent with the ecumenical spirit combined with a commitment to the Baptist heritage of FBC.

As I look out at you the members and supporters of First Baptist Church of Boulder, this morning I see **a bruised reed, bent but not broken.** I see **a dimly burning candle, but one which still flickers brightly and illumines the city.** I see a people who truly believe that we can once more be an important and prophetic voice in this place, and who are not afraid to dream dreams, have visions, and hope for a brighter day. As such, we really **reflect the Biblical model presented in Isaiah - servants. As such we are to be the light to the nations, call for justice.**

If, and when, this is accomplished it should be on the foundation of the servant, committed believers gathered together in community, to serve our city and world in the name Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth. We must be anew salt in Denver, the light of the world, a spiritual city of servants set upon a hill for all to see.

That is our challenge! This is our calling! This is our destiny!