

Order of Worship for April 22nd,

Pre-service Songs: **There’s a Sweet Sweet Spirit - Hymnal #391**

He is Exalted Hymnal #36

Welcome -and Announcements

Ministry Moment: (VBS)

Call to Worship:

(the worship theme is Thanksgiving for the giving of the Holy Spirit and His ministry illuminating the Word of God in our hearts and minds

Preparing the heart in Song:

- **Shine Jesus Shine – Hymnal #431**
- **Wonderful Words of Life - Hymnal #406**
- **Standing on the Promises - Hymnal #410**

Offering and Offertory

Special Music:

Message:

By Pastor Bronson

Songs of Worship in Response to the Word:

- **Spirit of the Living God - Hymnal #389**

Parting Word of Grace

“The Prayer Closet”

April 22, 2012

“Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving.”

(Colossians 4:2a)

This week let us be united in praying that:

1. **District and Home Office, EFCA:** the Lord will bring an effective servant of God as our new Superintendent; the Spirit will spur the Home Office, the Districts and the churches to renewed zeal in holy living and compassion for the lost; the Lord will strengthen the National EFCA in its commitment to Biblically defined seminary and college education and world missions
2. **President Obama:** the Lord will lead him away from partisanship to true statesmanship as President; the Spirit will open his heart and mind to the truth; he and his family will be protected from deceivers and manipulators
3. **Children’s Ministries:** the AWANA will end the year strong in clubber participation and adult leadership; the plans, preparations and personnel for VBS will come together smoothly and with Spirit empowered love and hope; the Lord will raise up summer staff for the Sunday classes
4. **Military or Public Service Personnel of the Week: Rebecca Wagenaar, SPC Army** (sister of Pam Cervantes):
5. **Young Adult of the Week: Mary Finn at Butte College** (daughter of Sean and Penny Finn):

We are going on in our study of John’s Gospel. As Larry Dunn pointed when he was reading the call to worship [Hosea 4:1-10 and 6:1-3], it is the same as last week. [The title for today is] “Listening in Order to Know”. If you want to open your scriptures to John 7:32-52, in a moment I am going to read this passage.

But in order to lead us into that, just a word of observation at the outset having to do with listening. There are various ways of listening. Each of us, anyone of us should be thoughtful about what is the disposition, the inner leaning of my heart and mind as I come into any setting – this of course is one, but there are many settings in which we come to hear. The one that always strikes me is the one that the Lord said to Ezekiel the prophet. He said, “You know, Ezekiel, the reason the people of Israel in Babylon (which is where he was) listen to you is because they are amused or entertained.” Listen to what it says in Ezekiel 33:32, *“And behold, you are to them like one who sings lustful songs with a beautiful voice and plays well on an instrument, for they hear what you say, but they will not do it.”* I remember the first time I read that. It makes you want to stop. There are other ways [of listening]. Obviously you can listen to learn because you desire to know. Equally, and I remember when this came home to me with overwhelming clarity. Oftentimes we listen in order to be confirmed in what we already know. One day, I think I told you all this, I realized about 90% of what I say each Sunday you have already heard before many, many times. It is simply being confirmed. When I realized that I thought to myself, “That’s a relief! I don’t have to make something up whole cloth every single week in order to keep these people well fed.” Oftentimes it is just affirming what you know, and we need that confirmation.

There is also another way of listening. That is to criticize and to condemn. This week I had opportunity to look over a curriculum that is designed for marriage counseling. Seeing as how most of us are married I probably don’t need to say anything more. Learning how to listen to our spouse in order to learn what they have to say rather than to arm ourselves with new projectiles to throw at them marks the difference between a healthy and happy marriage and one that is a living pain. Listening; it is key. In fact when I was in training as a pastor I was very pleased and somewhat surprised when I was taught that the most important thing I could do was to learn how to listen to what other people had to say.

This is central to our study today of the Pharisees, the rulers in Israel. If you haven’t yet turned to that passage, let me encourage you to do so: John 7:32-52. The rulers of Israel, the Pharisees and the Sadducees, the chief priests in Jerusalem, they listened to Jesus, but the reason they listened to Him was that they might find reason to condemn Him. Here is what John wrote:

“The Pharisees heard the crowd muttering these things about him, and the chief priests and Pharisees sent officers to arrest him. Jesus then said, ‘I will be with you a little longer, and then I am going to him who sent me. You will seek me and you will not find me. Where I am you cannot come.’ The Jews said to one another, ‘Where does this man intend to go that we will not find him? Does he intend to go to the Dispersion among the Greeks and teach the Greeks? What does he mean by saying, ‘You will seek me and you will not find me,’ and ‘Where I am you cannot come?’”

On the last day of the feast, the great day, Jesus stood up and cried out, ‘If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, “Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.”’ Now this he said about the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were to receive, for as yet the Spirit had not been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.

“When they heard these words, some of the people said, ‘This really is the Prophet.’ Others said, ‘This is the Christ.’ But some said, ‘Is the Christ to come from Galilee? Has not the Scripture said that the Christ comes from the offspring of David, and comes from Bethlehem, the village where David was?’ So there was a division among the people over him. Some of them wanted to arrest him, but no one laid hands on him.

“The officers then came to the chief priests and Pharisees, who said to them, ‘Why did you not bring him?’ The officers answered, ‘no one ever spoke like this man!’ the Pharisees answered them, ‘Have you also been deceived? Have any of the authorities or the Pharisees believed in him? But this crowd that does not know the law is accursed.’ Nicodemus, who had gone to him before, and who was one of them, said to them, ‘Does our law judge a man without first giving him a hearing and learning what he does?’ they replied, ‘Are you from Galilee too? Search and see that no prophet arises from Galilee.’”

We take up our study of John’s Gospel at verse 32. Last week if you were here you might recall we were already introduced to these verses. Just like the prophet Hosea had a special grievance with those who were the teachers of Israel – they were the priests and the Levites – Jesus has a grievance with those who were supposed to be the teachers of Israel. The name of the group, the Pharisees, came from their intense concern with purity that arose out of the Babylonian captivity. What they understood was that the reason they had gone into captivity, the reason that Israel lost the Promised Land was that they had refused to obey the law of God. So they were determined to correct that. Over time, their intention to correct this failure to observe the Law became concentrated on [observing] the Sabbath. Sadly the Pharisees – this is what we talked about last week – the Pharisees came to equate personal purity with a kind of hyper-conscientiousness about Sabbath observance. In John 7:32-36, the opening section of this passage, we find that the narrative that John is writing shifts from looking at the population in general to focusing on the authorities, these Pharisees. For most of them the questions about Jesus were settled: they were out to destroy Him. They had already determined that Jesus was their enemy.

But they failed [to get rid of Him]. Why do they fail? I want to bring your attention to one particular verse. It is John 7:30. What John says there is that Jesus survived because His hour had not yet come. As I have read through, worked through, prayed about and sought the Lord’s face regarding this passage my conclusion is that that is the single most important statement in all of these verses. Why? Oh, [it was because] Jesus lived by faith in His Father. Jesus’ confidence, Jesus’ inner strength, Jesus’ ability to stand in the midst and in the face of intense hostility did not come from inner self-confidence regarding His superior abilities and skills. Those were true; but His inner strength was [primarily] because He had absolute implicit inner faith in His Father. Consequently He knew that nothing would happen to Him until the Father allowed it to occur. What do we think about that? By way of application, for us here today, anyone of us may face great and even terrible trials in the days to come. That is what Jesus said. Jesus said the servant is not greater than the master. Jesus said, if they will persecute Me they will persecute you. So the question arises, “Am I prepared? Am I ready? Will I stand?” Fifteen years ago that would have been an almost totally rhetorical or theoretical question. It is not today. Today on a regular basis people who have a clear Christian profession are challenged and are often stripped of their rights and their position. This is what Jesus said in Luke 12:11, “*When they bring you before the synagogues and the rulers and authorities, do not be anxious about how you should defend yourself or what you should say, for the Holy Spirit will teach you in that very hour what you should say.*” So then the question arises, am I in tune with and listening to the Holy Spirit, because that is the key. This is the kind of faith that all of us should aspire to cultivate. We should be encouraging one another on a constant basis in seeking God’s face so that no matter what the hostile winds of our culture bring in our direction, we will stand.

Moving on, it is not clear to whom Jesus speaks in verses 33 and 34, although most likely He spoke directly to or in the hearing of the rulers and the authorities. His listeners assume that Jesus is still speaking of some earthly location when He talks about “where I am going to go”. Here is what He said in verse 35: “*Jesus then said, ‘I will be with you a little longer, and then I am going to him who sent me. You will seek me and you will not find me. Where I am you cannot come.’ The Jews then said to one another, ‘Where is He going?’*” Last week that we talked about how Jesus shifted the focus of the conversation. At that point people were saying, “Where does Jesus come from? Does He come from the right place? Does He come from Galilee and Nazareth or did He come from Bethlehem. Where is this guy from, because that is very important to determine whether or not He truly is the

messiah? Jesus changed the terms of the conversation, do you recall? He said, “It isn’t where I come from, it is Who sent me; do you know Who sent me? Notice that He will do the same thing in this case. He will shift the terms of the discussion and challenge these authorities on a whole new level. As I said, Jesus knew nothing could or would happen to Him that was not according to the will of His Father. He also knows that the people who are opposing Him are spiritually blind.

What is spiritual blindness? In this case He says specifically that they do not know the Father. Consequently they cannot believe what Jesus has to say. They cannot believe in who He has revealed Himself to be. When the evidence comes up it is like a shield goes across their eyes, and they are incapable of responding to the truth presented to them. But now what does that mean? It does not mean they cannot hear the words and understand those concepts. No, spiritual blindness has to do with the will. They cannot hear these teachings with the conviction that leads to sincere and sustained action. Remember what God said to Ezekiel? Lovely song, inspiring, learned on Sunday, forgotten Sunday afternoon.

The grammar of Jesus’ comments to the rulers – that is who He is talking to now – is revealing. Jesus does not say, “Where I am going. . .” or “Where I will be” you cannot come. What He says is, “Where I am. . .” Do you notice? This is one reason why you don’t move through the Word quickly; you want to move through slowly, taking note! It doesn’t say, “Where I am going. . .” It says, “Where I am you cannot come.” We have this double question: where is Jesus and why can the Pharisees not get there? Now in fact, Jesus is going to return to Jerusalem in not a terribly long time and He is going to walk directly into the arms of the officials and then be arrested and go through mock trials and then be crucified. Jesus is not intending to run away and hide. But the deeper reality is that Jesus only goes where the Father sends Him. That is where He is. Wherever He is, He is exactly where the Father wants Him to be. Well how do you get there? There is only one way to get there, and that is by obedience. It is the obedience of faith. It is the obedience that arises out of a heart that is in submission to God and desires to please God and to fulfill God’s will. So it doesn’t make any difference geographically where it is as long as it is where the Father has asked you to be. I was talking with someone not too long ago and a certain kind of observation came up contrasting my calling as a pastor and that person’s worldly occupation. And I said, “O, please understand, there is absolutely no difference between your calling and mine. The fact that I am called to be here and you are called to be there is strictly a matter of whether or not you are where God wants you to be, and you should never be confused about that. Where we want to be is where God has asked us to be, and that we can only know if we have implicit faith that He will take care of us.

When you come down to the beginning of chapter 7, just by way of reminder, John recorded that the feast to which Jesus had gone up, the feast which is the context for all of this conversation, is the Feast of Booths or the Feast of Tabernacles. It lasted about seven days. What it was focused on, what it celebrated was God’s welfare for His people. It combined the celebration of the New Year and the summer harvest. Pentecost celebrated the first of the spring harvest, which is why it was early on in summer. Most particularly this celebration celebrated the provision of water by God when the children of Israel were wandering through the wilderness. You might remember that on two occasions Moses comes up to a rock and he gets water from the rock, because God tells him. At the beginning of the Feast of Tabernacles there was a very elaborate ceremony involving water. That is why this is important if you look and see what Jesus says about water. Jesus, however, the word says, stands up not on the first day, but on the last, and I want us to think about that. It is the last day of the feast. By now the intensity of the celebration for these thousands of pilgrims has begun to fade. Why has it begun to fade? You know what it is like on the last day of vacation, or the last day you all gathered together with aunts and uncles and all those other add ons for some family feast, and you start saying to yourself, “OK, round up all the stuff, we don’t want to leave anything behind, especially one of the kids, unless we can get away with it!” What happens is that as you approach the end of a compelling and highly intense time together your mind begins to withdraw from that because you know you have to get your mind and yourself organized to go back into the normal context of life. In other words, by

this point the tension between the dreams of their faith and the daily realities of life will begin to be felt. They gather together, a people whose land is occupied by a foreign army, whose memory is of the loss of their unique status before God; they remember the remarkable provisions of their God, the miraculous care of God for them; they gather together at the temple which is the centerpiece of their worship of this wonderful God. And now, having drunk deeply of the glorious promises of the sufficiency of God, they are faced with the return to the world they actually live in. No matter where the pilgrims would go their homes would be in places of both political and religious oppression as well as economic hardship. Israel was a scattered people, broken, clinging to the promises and memories of an ancient God.

I think sometimes we the experience the same thing. I do. It is easy for me to grow nostalgic about a past in my own nation in which God was more widely honored, in which the values of strong character were more widely admired, where all of those beliefs which draw their substance and foundation from the Word of God were sort of the general understanding of the population of the average citizen in American. But those days are gone. You and I should be deeply shamed as well as deeply troubled by what has happened this year with the special services that take care of our President. But I suspect that you are as I; you figure that sort of thing goes on all the time; we just don't hear about it very often. Our politicians talk a great deal about the exceptional character of America; the problem is it is no longer true.

Returning to these Jews, we know from the Gospels, not just John, that for the most part the average person in Israel, this occupied land of Judah and Galilee, did not have an accurate understanding of the God they thought they were worshipping or the promises He had given to them. If you want to check that out look at Romans 10:1-4. Rather than the truths revealed by God shaping their hopes and, I would infer, their prayers, so that the prayers of the people and the hopes of the people reflect their deep knowledge of the Word of God and an understanding of the purposes of God and a desire to glorify God, and to fulfill those purposes on the face of the earth: rather than those truths revealed shaping their hopes and dreams, I suspect it is the intensity of their worldly desires, the intensity of their discontent, the intensity indeed of their resentment, and perhaps simply their daydreams. “Ah, if only, if only, if only!” When Jesus told the Samaritan woman at the well – chapter 4 of John’s gospel – when He told that woman that if she would ask Him, He would give to her a spring of water springing up within her heart, she either would not or could not allow the obvious truth of His words to break through to her understanding. So she gave a trivial answer to a profound offer. She said, “Great! It means I won’t have to bring my water pot to the well anymore!”

What do we imagine the crowds swirling through the courts of the temple heard when they heard Jesus cry out, “*If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the scripture has said, ‘Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.’*” Well, He is not talking now to a Samaritan; He is talking to Israelites who have been celebrating one of the great feasts commemorating the supernatural power of God in caring for His people. They know they are God’s people. If we listen to them according to what John has recorded, they did not think first of all of the immediate relief of some physical necessity or difficulty. Instead their thoughts leap to the ancient promises that God would once again send a chosen man. Verses 40-41: this man would bring a great change in the life of the nation, in the life of the people. If he was the prophet, if they say, “Oh, this is the Prophet!” well, that man was understood according to Deuteronomy 18:15, that man was going to be a man equivalent to Moses speaking directly to God and bringing a new word of revelation from God to the people. How exciting would that be? Or perhaps it would be the messiah, and if it was going to be the messiah, that greater son of David, Oh! What wondrous things to behold! But did they really listen to Jesus? You would think that if this was who was in front of you, I think it would be proper to say you would be hanging on every word. But when you read the narrative, you realize they never even went and talked to Jesus. I believe it is fair to say that Jesus’ words captured the imagination but it did not capture their will. It is an interesting contrast that John gives to us. Here they talk to one another and they tell each other contradictory expectations or speculations as to who that messiah might be, and the end result

of their conversation is an exactly big fat nothing. They do nothing. But in the twelfth chapter of John, 20-21 we learn that some Greeks, Gentiles, who are present at that time and they hear the words of Jesus, they then approach one of the disciples, and this is what we are told: *“Now among those who went up to worship at the feast were some Greeks. So these came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in galilee, and asked him, ‘Sir, we wish to see Jesus.’”* But here the people do nothing.

Meanwhile, as we know, the Pharisees have already acted. In John 7:32 John wrote that the Pharisees responded to the mutterings of the crowd by sending officers to arrest Jesus. When those officers return and they don't have Jesus with them, verses 45-52, the Pharisees say, what happened? Why don't you have Jesus? This is how they respond, *“No one ever spoke like this man!”* Those officers heard Jesus, but the authorities couldn't. John 3:20, you might remember made this comment: *“...everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed.”* The rulers of Israel were determined that they were not going to let themselves be exposed by the Light. So they refused to see who Jesus was.

We should not miss the irony of John's words in verses 47-50. Notice again what he says. *“Have you also been deceived? Have any of the authorities of the Pharisees believed in him? But this crowd that does not know the Law is accursed.”* Notice the next word: Nicodemus. Do you recall who Nicodemus was? Nicodemus is a Pharisee; he is a member of the Sanhedrin, the highest authority in the land. He is the guy who came in the night, and he believes in Jesus. Who is deceived in this scene? [It is the rulers], that is who is deceived, because they will not listen, they will not hear.

Notice how the Pharisees describe the people. What do they say about them? *“These people who do not know the Law are accursed!”* Whose responsibility was it to teach them the Law? Those words spoken by those men were self-condemning, though they did not notice. Nicodemus asks a question: *“Does our Law judge a man without first giving him a hearing and learning what he does?”* Now by now you should understand the irony of that statement. In order for the law to properly judge anyone, what must it do? It has to be able to listen and learn. But these men are blinded by a stubborn prejudice against the truth, and therefore they are incapable of accurate judgment. Indeed, we have here a rather clear exposition, an exposing of these Pharisees. They use the law, they were not submissive to the law. They use the law for their own ends.

Although he does not repeat Jesus' words given in 7:24, John's narrative has brought us again to their relevance. You might look at 7:24. He says, *“Do not judge by appearance, but judge with right judgment.”* This is Jesus' judgment on the Pharisees. You read it in Matthew 23. I will read it through swiftly: You might want to look it up.

“Then Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples, ‘The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses' seat, so practice and observe whatever they tell you—but not what they do. For they preach, but do not practice. They tie up heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on people's shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to move them with their finger. They do all their deeds to be seen by others. For they make their phylacteries broad and their fringes long, and they love the place of honor at feasts and the best seats in the synagogues and greetings in the marketplaces and being called rabbi by others. . . . Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you shut the kingdom of heaven in people's faces. . . . Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cumin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness. These you ought to have done, without neglecting the others. You blind guides, straining out a gnat and swallowing a camel! Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you clean the outside of the cup and the plate, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence.’”

Jesus goes on to say considerably more than I have read, but that is enough for us to understand.

I do not think that I error in my judgment or my observation in saying that what Jesus says of the ruling authorities in that day is true in this day. We have allowed a political culture to grow in this country which turns a blind eye to the corruption of those who have power.

Well, you might ask, so what. Once the Pharisees have been exposed for what they are shouldn't the people turn away from them and let them go their own course? Doesn't that become now the responsibility of the Pharisee themselves or does it become the responsibility of the people if they follow them even though they are blind guides? What Jesus says is that we need to exercise right judgment. We have to listen so as to hear.

Later on Jesus' own brother James, who was for a brief time the leader of the church in Jerusalem, wrote a letter. James 3:1 says this, *“Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness.”* When James wrote that the Holy Spirit had been given. Even more in our day everyone knows how to read the Bible. The Bible is readily available to anyone and everyone, and so too are all kinds of educational helps, teaching guides, the internet and all manner of things to enable the individual believer to study the Word of God, and I hope that all of you do. Indeed I hope that you study it well enough and carefully enough and insistently enough so that if I begin to wander off track, you are able to say, “You are wandering off track!” Because it is necessary not just for me to exercise right judgment, but for all of us to do the same. Even in our day individuals are equipped with the spiritual gift teaching and are called to be teachers in spite of all the aids and assist that we have. You will find that at Ephesians 4:11-13; *“And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ...”* He says it again in Romans 12:3-8; *“For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you – how many does he talk to? Everyone! – “not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another. Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith; if service, in our serving; the one who teaches, in his teaching; the one who exhorts, in his exhortation; the one who contributes, in generosity; the one who leads, with zeal; the one who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness.”* Paul's words to the Romans should alert us to the reality that even if a person is called and gifted, there is no guarantee that they will be faithful and true. I would invite you for one week (maybe half a week; maybe half a day!) just to go on the electronic media, however you do this, and just listen to every possible preacher of the gospel, so claimed, that you can possibly listen to, and I guarantee you, you will hear men and women of remarkable ability who spell out things that will be magnificent but not necessarily true. And you need to know how to exercise right judgment. In this age more than any other age in the history of the church there is no one who can protect anyone from false teaching. Consequently each one must rely on the Spirit of God and the Word of God, if you are going to stand fast.

Questions for Understanding and Application:

1. What is the personal benefit from having a strong view of and faith in the sovereignty of God?
2. What is the core issue in spiritual blindness?

3. Why did Jesus say his opponents could not come to where He is?
4. “The primary and defining issue in our lives is not what we do but why we do it.” Do you agree or disagree and why?
5. Do you ever experience any tension between what God has promised and what you experience?
6. What seems to most affect our prayers, cultural patterns or biblical teaching?
7. What might capture your imagination but not your will, and why is this important?
8. Have you experienced Pharisee types and what about them led you to that evaluation?
9. If every believer has the Spirit and the Word, why would God equip men to be teachers and preachers?
10. What is some of the most important thing to know about a teacher, and what tops the list?