

“Sharing”
Pastor John Bronson

John 5:22-27

January 27, 2013

Order of Worship for January 27th, title, “Sharing”, text, John 15:22-27

Opening Song:
Invocation: Isaiah 43:10-13

Welcome and Announcements
Ministry Moment:

Message Theme: The light of truth reveals the real condition of people’s hearts

Worship Theme: Giving thanks that God is the Light of Truth

Sunday Evening in the Word
Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 6:19-24, “Disciplines of a Holy Heart: Treasures”
5:30 – 7:00 pm in the Library

Opening Song:
“Everyday” Overhead

Invocation: Isaiah 43:10-13

Welcome and Announcements

Ministry Moment: Youth

Preparing the Heart in Song:
“Amazing Grace (My Chains are Gone)” Overhead
“His Eye Is on the Sparrow” Song # 624

Offering and Offertory: “Is There A Heaven For Me?”
by Mike Kokoletsos

Message: “Sharing” John 5:22-27
Pastor John Bronson

Closing Song:
“Give Thanks” Song # 170

Parting Word of Grace

Sunday Evening in the Word:
5:30-7 pm in the Library: Sermon on the Mount,
Matthew 6:9-24
“Disciplines of a Holy Heart: Treasures”

“The Prayer Closet”

January 27, 2012

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

(Colossians 4:2a)

This week let us be united in praying that:

Steve and Carol Lyons in Tanzania: the Lord will raise up partnering churches and volunteer teams for the expanded work through the schools in Dar Es Salaam; the Spirit will call up prayer warriors and finance support for the Lyons; the Lord will be pleased to reap a great harvest of souls in Tanzania

President Obama: the Lord will impart to him an altered moral vision of America in which individual freedom is nurtured first of all in the family and not by the state, the authority of God is greater than that of the state and law is the reflection of God’s character rather than human opinion

Board of Elders: the Spirit will establish a shared vision and understanding of the Lord’s will for the future of the church; the Lord will protect the men from external distractions and internal divisions; that each will encourage the others in the search for wisdom in God’s Word

Military or Public Service Personnel of the Week: TSgt. Pete Gibson (husband of Marjorie): please pray that Congress will pass the military budget with funding for the military.

College Student of the Week: Patti Ott (wife of Larry): please pray for her nursing board exams coming up on the 31st.

Please pray for our homebound family members: Harley & Hilda Chapman , Carol Koehler, Gary & Ruth Lentz, Fred & Jean Pauly

(please call the office to request updates to this list)

I.

The message for today is entitled “Sharing” and the scripture is John 15:22-27. Please pray with me: Father, hear us. We desire to be fed. We want the light of Your truth to flood into our minds that we would have a right understanding of Your will and a right perception of Your character, and we, by Your grace, would be conformed in the pursuit of Your purposes. Bless us with us with Your word, we ask in the name of Jesus and for the glory of You, our Father-God. In Jesus’ name. Amen

I am going to begin by reading the passage. Jesus is speaking to the disciples. They are no longer in the Upper Room. They are on the Mount of Olives near the Garden of Gethsemane. Jesus is addressing His disciples about the Jews, the religious establishment, the leaders. Jesus knows that already as He speaks Judas has contacted them. The High Priest and the Sanhedrin (ruling council of the Jews) have already sent out armed guards to arrest Jesus. Jesus knows this. So he is speaking about those men.

“If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not have been guilty of sin, but now they have no excuse for their sin. Whoever hates me hates my Father also. If I had not done among them the works that no one else did, they would not be guilty of sin, but now they have seen and hated both me and my Father. But the word that is written in their law must be fulfilled: ‘They hated me without a cause.’ But when the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness about me. And you also will bear witness, because you have been with me from the beginning.”

The first thing to attend to is to understand these statements that Jesus makes about the religious establishment, the leaders. He makes this statement: *“If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not have been guilty of sin. . .”* As one of the commentators points out, we would be mistaken if we took that statement, Jesus’ words, to mean that if a person doesn’t hear personally and directly from Jesus that they are not accountable for the teachings of Jesus. That is not in fact what Jesus is attempting to say. Jesus Himself makes that clear if we go to verse 24 where Jesus doubles back and addresses the same issue of their guiltiness again: *“If I had not done among them the works that no one else did, they would not be guilty of sin, but now they have seen and hated both me and my Father.”* The word that John uses here for Jesus’ actions or works (v. 24) is a general term which refers to more than just miracles. It actually refers to the whole conduct of His life, the way He operated with and manifested the graciousness of God and the righteousness of God: all that He does, all that He did and all that He said. It is a very comprehensive word describing His manner of life. Jesus not only spoke truth but He fulfilled the prophecies of the Old Testament and He displayed the righteousness of God and carried out one miracle after another. These miracles were the indisputable signs of the power of God working through Him. All of this, all that He has done, all that He has said again and again and again, this is the context that supports and makes clear what Jesus is saying about the condemnation that falls upon the religious establishment, the ruling elite.

If you are familiar with the Gospels you know that the nadir, the absolutely lowest level that the religious elite in Israel reached is when they accused Jesus of healing people in the power of Beelzebub. Beelzebub was an idol. The name means “Lord of the Flies”. Elsewhere in the New Testament Jesus said that the only unforgivable sin is the denial of the Holy Spirit. That is exactly what those men have done. What they have done is they have looked at the evidences of God and they have deliberately refused to accept them for what they are, and instead they attribute them to a demon. At that point they have hardened their hearts, they have blocked off their ears and they have blinded their eyes so that the evidences that Jesus is giving are no longer capable of penetrating into their darkened hearts and minds and souls. They are shut off. As we think about that, it is one thing to not see evidence because

you are so busy with other things that you don't notice. That is the way most people are most of the time: so fixed on the pursuit of their own particular this, that or the other thing that they don't stop and take note of what God is doing and saying. That is one level of ignorance. It is another thing to see the evidence and to misunderstand it, to not get the picture correctly. Very often that is the description of people who are being drawn by the Holy Spirit to come to know God, but they have not yet received the Holy Spirit, they have not yet got an understanding mind. So they will pick up parts and pieces of the evidence and they will try and understand and they will get in wrong. That is where you and I come in. But it is an altogether another thing to see the evidence, to know what it says and to say, “No!” That is what those men had done.

Although I have separated these verses in my exposition of Jesus' teaching here, in reality the devastating judgment that Jesus makes in verse 24 comes directly from what He already said in verse 21. In verse 21 Jesus made this comment: *“All these things they will do to you on account of my name, because they do not know him who sent me.”* The defining reality for the Jewish establishment in Jesus' day was that they did not know God. If you are familiar with the passage that precedes this one, you know that Jesus has warned His men; He has said that those who do not know God reject those who do. More exactly what Jesus said was that those who do not know God will hate those who do. That is a statement that should capture the attention of all of us who are in Christ.

Before we go forward I think it might be helpful, maybe even necessary, to understand what scripture means by the word “hate”. For us the way we use this term is normally that hate is on an emotional spectrum with love on the one side and hate on the other, and for us generally people who are in the middle, the people we neither love nor hate, they are just sort outside the range of our concern. After all, we can only care for or be emotionally involved with so many people. Even in this room, I suspect that anyone of us at this moment could look around and see quite a few people with whom we have no emotional engagement at all. In fact you could probably look around the room and see some people who are strangers: you don't know their name, you don't know anything about them. So it would be horrible to say that because someone doesn't know you that therefore they hate you. That would be an odd statement as we use the words.

But that is not how scripture uses the word hate. For the scriptures deal with the contact between God and humanity. Keeping that in mind is essential. Though we know very little about God, God knows everything about us. It is not an equal relationship. The essential thing we have to keep in mind is that God is not your average stranger. Scripture tells us that every person knows there is a God. It is written on the heart, into the consciousness. But we are also told that those who are alienated from God choose to ignore Him. To ignore God, however, is something far more than “not noticing.” What scripture tells us in Romans I:18-20 is that people actually suppress the knowledge of the truth about God in unrighteousness. Here is what it says: *“For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse.”* Perhaps the most startling confirmation of this statement – those of you who saw “The Truth Project” by Focus on the Family will remember this – was that one of the two men who broke DNA Code for the human gene told his students, even though all the evidence says somebody did this on purpose, don't believe it. That is the equivalent to someone taking the computers that run

our sound and screen system, laying them out in front of us, seeing all the circuitry and saying, “By the way, it just fell together. Don’t believe that anybody made this in spite of all the evidence to the contrary.”

However [this resistance] does not remain at merely an unwillingness to accept what is obviously the case. If you go on Romans to 3:9-18 Paul here spells out what is surely the most devastating indictment of unbelieving men that you can find in scripture. This is in the midst of a discussion that Paul is having and begins with a comment that is not germane to our interest.

“What then? Are we Jews any better off? No, not at all. For we have already charged that all, both Jews and Greeks, are under sin, as it is written: ‘None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one.’ ‘Their throat is an open grave; they use their tongues to deceive.’ ‘The venom of asps is under their lips.’ ‘Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness.’ ‘Their feet are swift to shed blood; in their paths are ruin and misery, and the way of peace they have not known.’ There is no fear of God before their eyes.”

The conclusion that is drawn is that this is the scriptural definition of hate: the scriptural definition of “hate” is the refusal to know the truth. In that refusal the rebellious soul keeps pushing [the evidence of the truth] away, but in order to sustain that saying “no” it begins to generate an internal emotional response and that response is [emotional hostility] for what keeps pushing in on you and denying your denial.

But at first blush, as when I first read [this section of] Romans with a comprehending mind, I thought it was way off the mark. How many of us know people like this: venom underneath their tongues and ravenous wolves? Such folk don’t live in our neighborhood or in our house! Surely this is an exaggeration! Our difficulty, however, in accepting such judgment is largely a consequence of not viewing others according to what we know of our own hearts. Generally we tend to justify the disordered impulses of our hearts, or we just dismiss them as not important. Certainly, we say to ourselves, I would never act like that; I would never say things like that. So this is the principle upon which people generally operate. We tend to operate on the to us reasonable assumption that what is hidden from view, what others cannot see or hear is much less important than and does not rise to the same level of reality as that which others do see and hear from us. How many of us would tolerate having a live video of all that we said and thought last week? Whoa, it is a good thing that doesn’t become public knowledge! But because it is not public knowledge, it really isn’t that important. We have it under control, it is properly suppressed. We are making proper progress in our appearance of righteousness. But God does not look at us the way our neighbors do. What we are told in the Word of God is that God looks on our hearts and in addition to being told that God looks upon our hearts scripture also says that the hidden condition of the heart is what is most real about us. Now that puts us in a very different place in dealing with God. Again, there is nothing about us that God doesn’t know. Scripture says that God looks at what is hidden in the heart and this is what or who we really are.

By contrast let me give you a bit of encouragement of a sort: most of us believe, rightly, that God protects us from many external dangers. Every time we let a teenager drive a car we [pray] that God will act! Many of us can give testimony of times we are absolutely convinced that angels intervened and prevented happening what could have happened, and we are deeply grateful. Have we considered, however, that God also protects us from what we might have done if left to our own devices? See here where the action of God occurs. This is not the action of God preventing that other driver from doing some dumb thing; this is the action of God preventing me from doing some dumb thing that without His action I would have done. There is a beautiful example of this in scripture that

is well worth our consideration. I encourage you to turn to or taken note of Genesis 20:6. This is the discussion of an occasion when Abraham the father of the faithful had once again done something really dumb. He passed Sarah off as his sister instead of his wife. He passed Sarah off to Abimelech’s household whereupon God begins to afflict all kinds of trouble on Abimelech’s household, and Abimelech cries out to God and says, “What gives.” Then in his conversation with God he says, “You know that I acted with the integrity of my heart: I had no idea she was a married woman, and furthermore I have not touched her.” This is God’s response in Genesis 20:6, *“Then God said to him in the dream, ‘Yes, I know that you have done this in the integrity of your heart, and it was I who kept you from sinning against me. Therefore I did not let you touch her.’”* Do we hear what he just said? “It was I who did not let you click on the Internet connection. It was I who caused you to walk right past the door where you could have gone in. It was I who silenced your tongue when you could have spoken and caused irreparable damage. I was I, not because you said, ‘Help me,’ because you did not want My help, but it was I.”

I need hardly say that this is rather unsettling while also profoundly comforting. I believe that the reality is that most people live in a more or less serious denial regarding what they know and what they fear is within themselves, what the scriptures refer to as the old man, the man that needs to be put to death if we are to be born again as the children of God’s grace. We are not in and of ourselves nice folk. Were the covering to be removed, were the restraining presence of the Holy Spirit to be removed, were we let free to simply be what the impulses that arise from within us would prompt us to be, you and I would not want to remain here. Contemplation of these truths, this depth of perception, the level at which God’s grace actually works in our lives helps us to understand that salvation is a joyful thing because it is so deeply serious.

What defines humanity’s relationship with God is the reality that God is a stranger to no one for no one is hidden from God. But for all, especially the non-believers, the presence of God is generally troublesome. The presence of God is often unsettling. The presence of God can be uncomfortable. The presence of God can even be embarrassing. I know that because I lived that as for eight years I ran away from God. Ultimately what the soul of the unsaved person desires is to silence the voice of God. Such a person seeks by whatever means to simply ignore the reality of God’s presence. Historically the most common way of ignoring God and silencing His voice is to worship something else. It is to occupy the heart in idolatry and therefore to pour out the hopes and the fears and all the aspirations [of the heart] on some other object so that you are busy and not having to deal with the real God. That is why idolatry is pervasive. John Calvin said the heart is a factory of idols; we produce them constantly so that we do not have to deal with the true God.

What defines humanity with relationship with God is the simply reality that God is a stranger to no one. The religious establishment [of Israel] did not know God and therefore as Jesus continued to walk amongst them, as He continued to speak God’s truth, as He continued to act out the compassions of God, as He continued to fulfill the prophecies that those men knew, it became more and more and more irritating until finally they said, ‘Let’s kill him!’ We are not strangers to that passion. Jesus said, *“If I had not done among them the works no one else did, they would not be guilty of sin, but now they have both seen and hated both me and my Father.”* The Jewish religious leaders prided themselves on knowing God, on being pre-eminently amongst all the peoples of the world the people of God. But they hated Him.

Jesus is speaking to His men. In v. 26 He offers them a word of comfort, because they understand that these are the kinds of people they are going to encounter and the kind of hatred that is going to come down on them. So in v. 26 Jesus says to His men, *“When the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness. . .”* Here is the heart of things for the Christian. God is indeed the God of all comfort. One of the most lovely [descriptions of God] in all of Scripture is in 2 Corinthians 1:3-4. This is what Paul says, *“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our afflictions so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.”* That is a verse to pick up, memorize and lay close to your heart as you recognize the deep desire that God has to come and to bring the healing balm of His loving presence and soothe away the pain and fear and anguish of heart that comes when we realize that around us are hostile forces, hostile voices, suspicion undermining us and who we are. We realize that God is the God of comfort.

But of course Jesus has already said, and just said again, that the Spirit of God is the Spirit of truth. What we have to remember at all times no matter where we are or what we are doing, is that God’s comforts do not obscure God’s truth. Those two must always remain in clarity, illuminating one another, so that we do not fall aside to the right or to the left. What Jesus tells His men in v. 27 is that when the Holy Spirit comes, He will come from the Father to bear witness about the Son, and then Jesus tells the disciples that they will do the very same thing: they will witness about the Son. They will do this even though they know that when they begin to take up the task of witnessing for Jesus Christ, they will be hated. The historical record says that every single one of the apostles except John was killed in some violent manner. John was imprisoned. It is, Jesus is telling them, the Spirit of God who will enable them to carry out this witness.

That is the title of today’s message: “Sharing”. Jesus has steadily led His disciples to this conclusion. Now that the hour of His departure has finally come – Jesus knows this; they do not know this quite yet – but now Jesus presses this message home. While He has been in the world and all that He has done in the world is what the disciples will now be expected to do. They will be Christ’s presence in the world.

What we have here is a different perception and understanding of what the work of grace is. One of the questions asked at the end of this text is, “When you hear the words “work of grace” what comes to mind?” For most of us what comes to mind is salvation, what was sung so beautifully about this morning. The work of grace is where the Holy Spirit reaches into our sin darkened lives, brings the light of His truth and the love of God and the forgiveness that is ours in Christ. This is the work of grace, but it is not [the whole] of the work of grace. It is the beginning of the works of grace. Here the work of grace is rightly understood as a disentangling of our lives from sin and the weight of sin’s guilt. That is a very comprehensive work. Some of us are still working our way free, aren’t we, of some of the entanglements and encumbrances of sin that hang on to us and impede our forward run. We continue to struggle with the shadows of yesterday’s sins falling over the path in front of us and we become uncertain of our steps, wanting more light from God. Rightly we should desire more light from God and seek the fellowship of the believers that we would be encouraged in the faith. This is all a first work of grace. Next grace strengthens us against the power of fear and at the same time strengthens us to resist the power of controlling desire. This is called sanctification. This is where we learn to walk faithfully. This is where we learn to push down and keep under control, what Paul says in Romans 8 is to put to death the desires of the flesh. This is where we

begin to look very different from our neighbors because we no longer operate on the same basis of desire or the same understanding of truth or the same perception of hope. Our lives are in the pursuit of heaven, not in the pursuit of worldly things that the world itself thinks are fantastic. So we are reordered and we become increasingly unlike the people who are around us. That is the second work of grace. The third work is, Jesus said, you will also bear witness about Me. That is the third work.

Jesus specifies in speaking with the disciples that they have been with Him from the beginning. Those men who are around Him, the men who were with Him in the Garden of Gethsemane, they know beyond a shadow of a doubt that they have personally called out from the world by Jesus, because Jesus came up to them and said, “Hey, you!” Do we remember when He talked to the guys in the boat? He said, “Hey, out of the boat and follow Me.” That was probably pretty clear in their minds. We have a record of a number of those callings. In the beginning none of those men knew what they were in for. Fishers of men: what would that mean to you? Of course we come along two thousand years after the fact and we know exactly what it means. It means you are going to go out and talk to people who don’t know Jesus Christ about knowing Jesus Christ: right? We know that. But I don’t think that is what those guys – Peter and Andrew, James and John – thought when Jesus said, “You are going to become fishers of men.” Don’t you wonder if Jesus smiled inside Himself?

If this statement was all that we had to go on we might plausibly tell ourselves that theirs was a unique mission, and in some ways it was. But we also have the record of the apostle Paul, who was called. We also know that Barnabas was called, and Apollos was called and Timothy and none of them had a personal encounter with Jesus. They were not with Jesus from the beginning, but they were with Him to the end.

What I would like for you to do at this moment is look at the list at the end of the text. In 2 Corinthians 5:11-20 Paul tells us what it means to share with Christ in the great work of God’s salvation in a fallen world. This is the third work of grace. (Don’t go and say Pastor John is writing a new theology and a new order of life built upon the first, second and third work of grace: that is not at all what I am doing. I am just laying out a scheme to kind of help us understand the way God works in our lives and pulls us into service.) I would like you to put your eyes on those eight statements as I read 2 Corinthians 5:11-20 and see where they connect with each other so you can go back to those verses and begin to ask yourself, “OK, do I get this connection? Do I see these directions? Do I understand what it is that God wants from me?” Here Paul speaks of what lies at the core of the Christian life and witness in the world. Beginning, therefore, at verse 11:

“Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade others. But what we are is known to God, and I hope it is known also to you conscience. We are not commending ourselves to you again but giving you cause to boast about us, so that you may be able to answer those who boast about outward appearance and not about what is in the heart. For if we are beside ourselves, it is for God; if we are in our right mind, it is for you. For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died; and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised.

From now on, therefore, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we once regarded Christ according to the flesh, we regard him thus no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled

us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against the, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.”

We are believers. We are those who have received the gift of forgiveness, the Spirit and eternal life. At this point there is but one question that I would like to leave you with: “At which stage in the works of grace am I?” Am I at the stage where God is still trying to disentangle my life from sin? Am I at the stage where I am beginning to draw strength in order to be remade into the image of Christ? Am I at the stage where I am prepared to go in the strength of the Holy Spirit, armed with the word of God and bear witness for Jesus Christ in the ministry of reconciliation that others would be brought into the kingdom and God would be glorified.

Please pray with me: Heavenly Father, there is with you no such thing as spiritual escapism. You are profoundly practical. You desire, our Father, not that we would merely believe, that is ascent in our mind to a message that is attractive, but rather that we would be convicted, changed, and put to use for your name’s sake. We ask, our Father, all these things in Jesus’ name. Amen.

Questions for Understanding and Application:

1. Does your personal experience agree with the statement that those who do not know God reject those who do? Would people in general agree with the statement?
2. Do you agree that people keep many of their thoughts and feelings secret? Do you agree that they hide their fears and uncertainties also? Do you think it is right for God to judge us for these hidden things?
3. Have we considered that God also protects us from ourselves, that He intervenes to keep us from doing what we might if left to our own devices? (See **Genesis 20:6**)
4. Do you think that people find either the presence of God or even just the thought of God troublesome, unsettling or even embarrassing? Why do you think this is so?
5. God’s comforts do not obscure, let alone cancel, God’s truth. Is it possible to think otherwise? How might one say that God’s comforts do cancel His truth?
6. What does the phrase “work of grace” bring to your mind?
7. Has the grace of God been effective in freeing you from fears as well as enabling you to resist distractions, overcome temptations and bring under control desires that formerly controlled you? What have been some of your major challenges?
8. What sort of witnessing do you sense the Lord is preparing for you to engage in?
9. Who do you know that needs to be reconciled to God?

Eight truths from 2 Corinthians 5:11-20.

1. Believers are those who fear the Lord and that fear prompts us to persuade others of the truth.
2. The power of this persuasion is a matter of the heart and not of visible abilities.
3. In addition to knowing Christ, it is knowing the reality of the spiritual life of those who bring, model and instruct you in the gospel that enables believers to resist and expose the claims of those who pretend to spiritual life and wisdom.
4. Bearing witness for Christ is something to be done in one’s “right mind”, meaning with rational faculties and clear articulation and a sound grasp of the truth.
5. We now live for Christ and not for ourselves.
6. We view all people as those for whom Jesus died.
7. We accept every believer as a new creature in Christ, and therefore release them from what they were and may have done!
8. We accept the ministry of reconciliation as ours from Christ and appeal to others to be reconciled to Christ.