

August 13, 2017

“Familiarity with God”
Matthew 13:53-58

FCF: Bored with life. And with God.

PROPOSITION: (anchor) Through Christ, God has drawn near.
(magnet) But we must be wary of familiarity with Him.

SCRIPTURE INTRODUCTION:

The end of summer brings the beginning of the school year. Which is a time of distress for many students. And a time of delight for many parents. For the coming of the school year means an end to the sad cry of there being “nothing to do” and an end to the bane of boredom.

But boredom goes far beyond this. It’s what drives our apathy, indifference, and loss of meaning. As Richard Winter notes in *Still Bored in a Culture of Entertainment* ([READ quote](#)):

Though we have hundreds of entertainment options today - video games, the Internet, CD and MP3 players, home entertainment centers, sporting events, megamalls, movie theaters, and even robotic toys - Western culture is battling an insidious disease. It's an epidemic of boredom.

It’s possible to be bored with summer. It’s possible to be bored with life. It’s possible to be bored with God. That’s insane but it’s possible. And more true of us than we care to admit.

SCRIPTURE READING: [Matthew 13:53-58](#)

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

SERMON INTRODUCTION:

Some of you know, as of this week, Luke Banner completed his licensure and ordination examinations. A part of that was the theology exam, testing his grasp of some weighty concepts.

Many of those involve a bit of tension. The best known is the tension between divine sovereignty and human responsibility. But there are others. The nature of God - one God in three persons. The person of Christ - fully God and fully human. The doctrine of Scripture - one divine author and the human writers. We cannot pit one side of any of these against the other but have to hold to both at the same time. In fact, we can get into serious trouble otherwise.

Another of these tensions is between God’s transcendence and imminence. That is, He is utterly unlike us in that He is a spirit, infinite, eternal, and unchangeable in His being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth. And yet, at the same time, He is with us. Much like what we see with the Tabernacle in the midst of the camp - God in the midst of the people but this was clearly not just another tent. It pointed to the Immanuel promise - God with us.

Which brings us to this account of Jesus’ homecoming and rejection at Nazareth. Again, there is a tension. And we must not de-emphasize one side against the other. For what we see is that, through Christ, God has drawn near. But we must be wary of familiarity with Him.

We’re going to look at this progressively from three perspectives. First, the problem of familiarity. Second, the danger of familiarity. And then, third, the cure for familiarity.

I. THE PROBLEM OF FAMILIARITY

So, first, the problem of familiarity. We have a case study ([READ Matthew 13:53-57a](#)).

A) *The Return to Nazareth*

1. The departure from Capernaum

Jesus has left Capernaum, His base of operations. Capernaum sat on the NW shore of the Sea of Galilee. It was a center of commerce and trade, a custom post with a military attachment there.

2. A description of Nazareth

He has left Capernaum to go to Nazareth. This was somewhat remote. That said, Nazareth sat on a major trade route and relatively near Sepphoris, a major city. So this was a frontier town.

B) The Response to Jesus

1. His hometown

How would these folks respond to Jesus? Keep in mind this was His hometown. This is where He grew up. He likely learned to read in this synagogue. So we might expect a warm welcome.

2. Their hostility

But this was hometown hostility. Home is where we're often received better than anywhere else. But not always. If you've had great success, that warmth can get cold. We read of astonishment, criticism, and offense. "Who does He think He is? He has no special bloodline or training."

They thought they knew Him. So we see something here of the problem of familiarity.

Illustration:

Fast forward a few decades and to the church of Laodicea. We read of this in Revelation 3. Jesus said they were "lukewarm...neither hot nor cold." The background here being that the waters of the nearby Lycus River were muddy and undrinkable. The water came by an aqueduct flowing from a hot spring five miles away. Which was lukewarm by the time it got there.

Application:

Could the same be said of us - tepid and lukewarm? What would be the signs of a heart that has become too familiar with God? Flippancy would be one. Flippancy towards God (as the man upstairs). Towards others (just old so-and-so). And our sin (just a mistake or an oversight).

Flippancy is one. Apathy is another - especially to the gospel message and the means given to press that into our lives (word, sacraments, prayer). So flippancy and apathy. And one more - callousness. Indifference to the spiritual state of those around us. Those are all marks.

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II. THE DANGER OF FAMILIARITY

But the problem of familiarity then takes us to the danger (**READ Matthew 13:57b-58**).

A) Jesus' Warning

1. Implicit

Listen to Jesus' warning. What was He saying? Implicitly, He is aligning Himself with the long line of prophets who had revealed God's purposes for His people but were yet rejected by them.

2. Explicit

Then explicitly, Jesus was calling them out for that very thing. Familiarity had bred contempt.

B) Jesus' Refusal

We need to listen to the words He speaks. And then observe what He refuses to do.

1. Clarification

He refuses to show His power as He had in other places. Why? Not because of an inability to act but an unwillingness to perform. For He did not come to entertain or amaze with a sideshow.

2. Consequences

Meaning what? He was allowing them to live with the consequences of their decision. They did not want Him. So that's what He refused to give them. He held back His words and works, His message and miracles. They didn't really want it. So He was letting them go their own way.

And that's a terrifying thing. This is the danger of familiarity.

Illustration:

Again, Jesus' words to the church of Laodicea (**READ Revelation 3:15-16**). Cold water would refresh. Hot water would soothe. But this was neither. Which brought forth a response of disgust. What was at the root of this? (**READ Revelation 3:17**) There was no commitment to Christ because there was no conviction of sin. They were self-sufficient and self-righteous.

Application:

Could that be said of us? Do we know ourselves to be beggars - with nothing to purchase our forgiveness? Do we know ourselves to be naked - with no clothes of our own making to stand before God? Are we blind to our spiritual poverty and destitution outside of Christ?

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III. THE CURE FOR FAMILIARITY

Such is the problem and the danger of familiarity. What is the cure? To look to the cross. This is what the rejection at Nazareth points towards. Jesus had tasted something of this already. But the rejection at Nazareth points all the more clearly to the coming rejection at Jerusalem.

A) To See Our Sin

It is at the cross we see our sin for how heinous it is. And what God's justice demands.

1. The surface level

At the surface level, this was but a state execution - all dignity stripped, ruthlessly beaten, cruelly mocked, publicly nailed. Meant for enemies of the state to be made an example for others.

2. Going deeper

But this is more than that. This was divine judgment. At the cross, Jesus was abandoned by His Father. This is why the sky went dark that day at mid-day. This is why He pleaded for another way the night before and why He cried, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken Me?"

B) To See Our Savior

The cure for familiarity is to look to the cross. To see our sin. And to see our Savior.

1. In our place

To see all that happened to Him was because He took our place. Think with me. This is the sinless One condemned for sin by the perfect Judge. How could this be? He was taking what we deserved upon Himself. Lifting it off of us and carrying it away like the scapegoat of old.

2. Out of love

Why? Out of love. Out of love. He was compelled to do this but only out of love. Love for you. That's what held Him there on that cross. It wasn't the nails. No, it was His love for you.

That's the cure for our familiarity, for our apathy and indifference. Look to the cross.

Illustration:

One more time to the church at Laodicea. We've heard Jesus' warning. But there was also an invitation ([READ Revelation 3:17-20](#)). Paupers made sons and daughters of the royal court. Homeless transients given a place not just off in the corner but at there at the great table.

Application:

What are the signs? Could such be said of us? Do we hear the invitation? Our rejection has been met by His. The rejection we deserve from God Jesus took on Himself. Familiarity with God cannot coexist with our feeding upon this. Boring down on this presses all boredom out. Oh, how vital it is that we lay hold of every means to preach this good news to ourselves.

What is the cure for our familiarity? We have but to see our sin and to see our Savior.

CONCLUSION:

Please don't misunderstand. In sounding the alarm about a familiarity with God, we must not in any way lose our wonder about His drawing near. That would be to make the mistake I mentioned earlier - to de-emphasize one side of the tension. So how then do we live with these two things at the same time? Let me read you this reflection by Philip Yancey ([READ quote](#)):

I learned about incarnation when I kept a salt-water aquarium. Management of a marine aquarium, I discovered, is no easy task. I had to run a portable chemical laboratory to monitor the nitrate levels and the ammonia content. I pumped in vitamins and antibiotics and sulfa drugs and enough enzymes to make a rock grow. I filtered the water through glass fibers and charcoal, and exposed it to ultraviolet light.

You would think, in view of all the energy expended on their behalf, that my fish would at least be grateful. Not so. Every time my shadow loomed above the tank they dove for cover into the nearest shell. They showed me one emotion only: fear. Although I opened the lid and dropped in food on a regular schedule, three times a day, they responded to each visit as a sure sign of my designs to torture them. I could not convince them of my true concern. To my fish I was deity. I was too large for them, my actions too incomprehensible. My acts of mercy they saw as cruelty; my attempts at healing they viewed as destruction.

To change their perceptions I began to see would require a form of incarnation. I would have to become a fish and "speak" to them in a language they could understand.

So, imagine if Philip Yancey became one of his fish - like them and yet utterly unlike them at the same time. What then is a fish to do when the great aquarium keeper gets down into the water?

Surely, this would hardly leave any grounds for boredom or boasting, indifference or apathy, pride or presumption. It would have to be cause for great wonder and worship, intimacy and engagement, awe and obedience. Well, that's not too far removed from what we have here.

Through Christ, God has drawn near. It is the great wonder of the Incarnation. Through Christ, God has drawn near. It is a great wonder. But may we be wary of familiarity with Him.

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