

## Not to be seen of men

“Take my yoke upon you and learn from me.” -- Jesus Christ

Many pray the Sinner’s Prayer without it “taking.” Why is that? In my opinion, one of the unintended consequences of crusade evangelism in our day is that almost everyone, Christian and non-Christian alike, having viewed a crusade on television, believe that if one is to “get right with God,” what that person needs to do is go forward in response to the invitation by the preacher.

That kind of evangelism is not to be found in the New Testament. Nowhere will you read of people making “decisions” for Christ. Instead you read of people becoming disciples of Jesus. The word “disciple” is used 268 times in the New Testament. The word “Christian” only three times. Praying the Sinner’s Prayer CAN be a useful marker in time for someone becoming a disciple of Jesus. My fear though is that “going forward” and “praying the prayer” is understood by many as the way of salvation. It is not. The way of salvation is found in trusting Jesus Christ. This trust, or faith, involves a chosen reliance on Jesus, surrendering control of one’s life into His hands, with the intention of learning how to live the rest of one’s life directly from Jesus Christ. In other words, becoming His disciple.

Each of us has a kingdom, namely our sphere of influence and responsibility. Our kingdom begins with our mind and body, it includes our clothing, our tools, our home, it extends to our automobile, our desk at work, our computer, the way we do our job, our ministry, our family members, our friends, our neighbors, and all other arenas and events we have “say” over. Our kingdom includes our interests, our habits, our hobbies, what we spend our money on, and how we spend our time.

Jesus too has a kingdom. It includes both the physical and spiritual universe. To our point, His kingdom is the flow of life all around us, wherein God is directing all life, from the smallest microbe in the soil, to the wind blowing at the top of Mount Mitchell, to the automobiles traveling on I-485, to the interactions of the people at our work, to each sparrow that falls to the



*Scott  
Hilborn*  

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*Guest  
Columnist*

ground. We “come to Jesus” by placing our kingdom under His kingdom with the intention of trusting Him to rule over us and all the varied aspects of “our” kingdoms. This includes the matter of our guilt before God due to sin. This includes our need to be filled with divine power. This includes our need to be delivered from the dominion of the evil one. It also includes our need to be shepherded and protected in our faith from now until death. It includes our need for this mortal body to be raised up in glory. And, it includes our need to learn how to get along with our family, how to do our job at work with skill and integrity, and how to live in divine love so as to be God’s instrument in ministry towards others.

Our life as a disciple can be summed up as “learning to trust Jesus Christ with everything.” Clearly, bringing our kingdom into His kingdom and trusting Jesus to run our show includes the clear-headed intention on our part to cooperate with His governance and our willingness to adjust our kingdom in line with His wishes. But the root of all such obedience is trust. We entrust ourselves—everything about ourselves—to Jesus.

Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount is a display of what life will be like for His disciples as we grow confidently in His kingdom. God, to our surprise and delight, proves to be sufficient for all our needs. We find we are completely cared for by an Almighty God. Knowing this, really knowing this, enables us to begin to let go of fear and anger, contempt and lust, the managing of other people to suit our ends, and our “need” to straighten out other people. We even begin to find compassion for those who are against us.

Yes, we do “religious” things, but not to earn Brownie points, but simply because

we want to. We know that the various spiritual disciplines that Jesus practiced (which we emulate, such as solitude, silence, study of Scripture, fasting, worship, acts of service) act as means of grace for us. Prayer, the memorization of Scripture, and charitable giving are not things we do to gain God’s attention. Rather, they are wise things we practice that merge us into the flow of life in God.

Which is why they are best done in secret.

Jesus Christ taught His followers that God appreciates the ways we love and serve Him in secret. He assures us that God will reward us for what we do for His notice. “Your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.” (Mt 6:4)

Our temptation is to do things to be noticed by others. If the applause of others is our motive, then their notice will be our reward—but our only reward, for we will have none with God. The hunger for human approval lies large and deep within our fallen hearts. Each week I name one of my high school students as “Student of the Week.” Each semester I privately fear they will find this to be unbearably corny. But sure enough, it is never long before the kids are asking me insistently, “When am I going to be named Student of the Week?”

Who doesn’t like human praise? I’m not sure myself that I will ever leave it behind entirely in this life. We who are pastors find ourselves in the predicament of being “professional” Christians—after all, we get paid to pray and preach “well.” But who really knows whose ears we pastors are trying to reach? Well, God knows. The phrase, “audience of one,” is so important. God is constantly aware of our heart. He knows when we are showing-off and when we are sincere. God help us! God help me. “Dear Lord, please wean me away from seeking the praise of others—so that I might instead seek your praise—and your praise only.”

*Scott Hilborn is the pastor of the  
Banks Presbyterian Church in Marvin.*