

"Do You Love Me?"

John 5:39-47

February 5, 2012

Pastor John Bronson

Order of worship for February 5, 2012, Communion

Prelude

Pre-service Song (8:55 am)

Welcome and Announcements

Ministry Moment:

Call to Worship: John 10:7-11 and 14-17 and Prayer

Hymn of Praise:

"Lamb of God"

Song # 302

Offering and Offertory

Message:

"Do You Love Me?" (John 5:39-47)

By Pastor Bronson

The Lord's Supper:

Preparing the Heart:

"Power of the Cross"

Overhead

Invitation and Prayer of Confession and Dedication

Consecrating and Distributing the Elements

Responding to God's Love:

Words of Praise and Thanksgiving from the Congregation

"How Deep the Father's Love for Us"

"There Is a Redeemer"

"Hallelujah, What a Savior!"

Overhead

Song # 308

Song # 311

Parting Word of Grace

Sunday Evenings in the Word

5:30 pm to 7:00 pm

Cancelled

All are invited to a post-wedding soups and breads reception for

Mr. Adam and Rebecca Brewer

At the Bronson Family Home

199 Oliva Ave.

From 1:00 pm to 5:00 pm

“The Prayer Closet”

*February 5, 2012*

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

(Colossians 4:2a)

This week let us be united in praying that:

**Vance and Carol Johnson: Evangelical Theological college of the Philippines:**

God ensure sufficient prayer and financial support for the school and for the Johnson family; their children in the States for college will be strong in faith and witness; the Gospel in the Philippines will outshine the Muslims

**President Obama:** the Spirit will open his heart and mind to the Bible as the whole counsel of God; the Lord will protect his family from all harm

**Purity Ball:** all those involved in planning and preparing will share a common sense of calling as a team preserving the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace; the Lord will bless those who prepare and those who attend with a clear sight of His love of purity and holiness in us

**Military or Public Service Personnel of the Week: SPC Cole Wagenaar** (brother-in-law of Augie & Pam Cervantes): that he find a good job when he leaves the Army in March.

**Young Adult of the Week: James Kinnamont** (son of Kent and Mami Kinnamont): for guidance and wisdom in the non-profit organization that he is running (getting musical instruments to children in need)

The title of today’s message is “Do You Love Me?” You might recall, if you are familiar with the Gospel of John, which is what we have been working through, that at the very end of the Gospel Jesus has a conversation with Peter [the apostle]. He asks Peter three times over that same question, “Do you love me; do you love me; do you love me?” The third time around Peter was actually almost aggravated, he was grieved by this, he was grieved to think that Jesus wouldn’t just trust and know that he loves Him. Sometimes we need to reflect carefully on that question and ask ourselves, “Is it really true?”

Jesus in chapter 5 of John’s Gospel in the twentieth verse made this comment to the Pharisees who were contending with Him. This is what He said, “*Greater works than these will the Father show me that you may marvel.*” Jesus in dealing with the Pharisees knew that something had to capture their attention and break through the walls that they had managed to build up against hearing God speak to them. One way of doing that was by subjecting them to marvels. Encountering the marvelous we can sometimes be amazed and it can have the effect of at least temporarily altering a person’s perspective on the world. When our perspective on what is real is altered, then sometimes a different reality can break through to our comprehension. I thought about this. This is what poets experience. They look out on the face of the earth and they catch a different perception. It captures their hearts and minds and they give expression to it. By the way this is also what happens with both philosophers and scientists. They are looking at a bunch of stuff that you and I look at all the time, then all of a sudden they see it in a new configuration and they [say], “Oh my goodness! It could be that, or it could be this!” So they are suddenly liberated from old ways of thinking and allowed [enabled] to pursue new ways of thought. Sometimes just being exposed to what is marvelous can do that.

However we need to know that it can be sometimes for the good and it can be sometimes for the bad, in other words, not too effective. There are a couple of examples of that in the Scriptures that you might recall if you have been going with us through our study of John’s Gospel. There is an example just back in chapter 4 of a marvel for the good. You might recall that there was a man, an official of Herod – no great friend of Jesus – whose son was dying. He appealed to Jesus, “Will you heal my son.” Jesus said, “He is healed.” That was not the marvel. The man says “OK.” Then the man walks back towards his home. On his way home the servants come and he says, “How’s my son?” The servants says, “He’s getting better.” The man says, “When did he start getting better?” They tell him the hour and the man says, “That is exactly when Jesus said...” and it altered his perception of reality. We are told that at that moment the man believed. He didn’t believe before, but he did at that moment. He was amazed to think that Jesus could speak a word and heal his son who wasn’t even in his presence. That is a positive example: marveling led to belief.

However in the Scriptures there are other examples and one that comes to mind is that of Simon Magus. You might want to turn to Acts 8. I am not going to read the account. This is the account of Simon Magus who also had occasion to meet Jesus and to marvel. He was a magician. He came under the influence of the preaching of the gospel and the kingdom of God in the name of Christ. We are told that Simon believed and he was baptized. We are also told that shortly thereafter the apostles had to come down from Jerusalem because the Holy Spirit had not yet been poured out on these newly baptized believers. Now that is an important thing for us to know. Because we know from the Word of God that it is the Spirit of God that changes the heart of man. So even though Simon Magnus has believed and has been baptized, he yet has not had the work of the Holy Spirit within him. So his heart remains unchanged.

Now it is pretty obvious that Simon thinks that what Jesus had to say was a good idea, and he attaches himself to Jesus and to the movement. He marvels however in particular when he sees that the Holy Spirit is poured out on these believers. Then we are told this, “*When Simon saw that the Spirit was given through the laying on of the Apostles’ hands he offered them money saying, ‘Give me this power also, so that anyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit.’*” Doesn’t that sound like a good idea? Wouldn’t you like to be able to give the Holy

Spirit to whoever paid you enough money? Peter’s response to him cuts right to the quick, and what Peter says is, *“May your silver perish with you because you thought you could obtain the gift of God with money. You have neither part nor lot in this matter, for your heart is not right before God. Repent, therefore, of this wickedness of yours, and pray to the Lord that, if possible, the intent of your heart may be forgiven you. For I see that you are in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity.”* Simon the magician was more interested and intrigued with the power to bestow the Holy Spirit when and where he would than he was in being reconciled with the God who gives the Holy Spirit, the God of Heaven. So we see that Simon Magus’ heart had not been moved to love God, that he had not been moved to lift up his eyes off of earthly gain of wealth and power and fame. He was still stuck at the same level he had been living before he heard the gospel. So he is absorbed back into the world. That is a case, you see, of marveling that didn’t do any good.

Simon Magnus is a picture of the condition of the Jews in Jesus’ day, a condition untouched by even the most dramatic and amazing of the miracles that Jesus performed. As He comes to the end of His discourse with the Jews, the Pharisees in particular, here in John chapter 5, Jesus finally confronts them. He simply confronts them with the truth of their utter faithlessness. He lets them know that their hearts are hardened against God, that they have placed their hopes in themselves and not in the God who saves. We are going to read that and I suggest that you open your scriptures to John 5:39-47. If you read the discourse right from the beginning, if I were to go back to verse 19 and track all the way through to verse 47, you would watch and you would hear how the tone of Jesus’ comments changes. He begins in a very conciliatory way; he is definitely appealing to them, trying to draw them to a place of understanding. But by the time you get to the end, Jesus is no longer conciliatory. He is saying, “This is the way it is, this is the way you are, and I am telling it to you straight.” You want to watch for that change. Now that’s the section; looking therefore at John 5:39-47 this is what Jesus says:

(v. 39) *“You search the scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me, (v. 40) yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life. (v. 41) I do not receive glory from people. (v. 42) But I know that you do not have the love of God within you. (v. 43) I have come in my Father’s name, and you do not receive me. If another comes in his own name, you will receive him. (v. 44) How can you believe, when you receive glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from the only God? (v. 45) Do not think that I will accuse you to the Father. There is one who accuses you: Moses, on whom you have set your hope. (v. 46) If you believed Moses, you would believe me; for he wrote of me. (v. 47) But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe my words?”*

This becomes Jesus’ judgment on the Jews or the Pharisees. What does Jesus say to these interesting men? First He says, “You have a boast. What you boast about is your knowledge of the Word of God. That is what you boast about.” This had been the great boast, by the way of the Pharisees since the Jews had returned from Babylon. It is generally acknowledged that it was at that time that the Jews had developed the synagogue as a means for keeping the Word fresh in their minds and in the minds of the people, firmly implanted in the hearts of the young who were to be taught by the rabbis, this was when they begin the schools. However as we are told in I Corinthians 8:1-2, it is one thing to have knowledge, but it is quite another to have understanding. This is what Paul writes to the Corinthians, Paul being a former Pharisee: *“Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up. If anyone imagines that he knows something, he does not yet know as he ought to know. But if anyone loves God, he is known by God.”* The Pharisees were very impressed with how much they knew. By the way, they would probably put every person in this room to shame. It was part of their discipline to memorize vast chunks of the Old Testament. Jesus however confronts them with the reality of their stubborn ignorance which was the result of their self-love crowding out love for God. The Pharisees had come to the place where they believed that they knew the Scriptures; they had mastered the Word of God. If you know anything about them, they had all kinds of ways of interpreting them, and they had all kinds of commentaries about them. It was amazing how much they could say about the Word of God – almost as much as I have to say now and then! However, because they already “knew” they felt no need to go and find out anything new from somebody else, like Jesus. Notice what Jesus says: *“You search the scriptures because*

*you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me, yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life.”*

I believe this talks to us. It is common for evangelicals, people like us, to be proud about how much we know about the Bible and to speak slightly about those liberals who don't know all that much about the Word of God. But there are two dangers that we then encounter. No one should ever assume, beloved, that by reading the scriptures you can possibly know all you ever need to know about God. Do we really think that this book, as amazing as it is, contains all that there is to know about anything, let alone all there is to know about the will of God and the purpose of God and the plan of God and the character of God and God's direction for us in our present situation? What the Scriptures do tell us is, they tell us enough to know of our need for a Savior. They tell us that Jesus was sent by God as that Savior. They tell us how we can have faith and be saved and so be reconciled to God and meet with Him. That is what they are designed to do. They tell us much else [but] no less than that.

The issue that arises is our response to reading the Word. What is the right response to reading the Word? The right response is first of all prayer. “God, I have just taken some time; I began by asking You to give me wisdom; I come now to you and I say, would You please help me understand what I have just read?” This kind of prayer is to be followed up with further prayer, prayers of thanks, prayers of adoration, prayers of praise. “O Lord, it is good to be in Your presence. It is good to be convicted of the places I have fallen short. It is good to have my mind opened to possibilities I haven't thought of before. It is good to remember Your graces, to have looked back into the past as the record is given to us and see the way You have dealt with people in the past and to have new hope given to me that I might yet find my way forward.” Beyond that, the proper response to scripture is to pray that I would understand, to have a grateful heart full of remembrance, and to say, “Now God of heaven do not leave me where I am. Call me so I know where I am supposed to go. Open to me the path of obedience. Help me to know how I am to be a servant. I do not want to just sit here where I am. I want to be a disciple that follows You. So teach me out of the Word how to love and serve.” It is essential for us – whatever the situation was with the Pharisees at this point is irrelevant – to recognize that the Word of God fails of its purpose if it does not succeed in bringing us into a personal encounter with the Lord. Any of us, as we come to the Word day by day, if days go by, or weeks, and there is no life, if there's no conversation, if I don't feel I am being drawn into a connection with the Living God, then my suggestion is that you give up whatever else you thought you were going to do and you take the time to connect, because in the meantime you are simply wasting your time. Indeed, you may be deepening channels of disobedience by persevering in a course or direction for which you have not in fact received the blessing of God. There are a couple of questions I think that arise. I ask that you would consider these. Has your reading of the Bible brought you closer to the Lord, a deepening sense of personal connectedness with the Living God? If not, what needs to change? We are going to be celebrating the Supper in just a little bit. Heaven forbid that it would be an empty exercise, mere formality, an action taken without any connection with the God we are remembering.

The truth is that we serve that which or those whom we love. In the 41<sup>st</sup> verse in this section, chapter 5, Jesus contrasts Himself with the corrupted heart of these people. This is what He observes about them, He says “You are ceaseless hungry for affirmation and praise. You are ceaselessly hungry for affirmation and praise.” Then the 44<sup>th</sup> verse – look what Jesus says. He says, “*How can you believe [He means to believe in God]; how can you believe, when you receive glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from the only God?*” This I think is made even more pointed, more clear in the Apostle Paul, again this converted Pharisee, in the second letter that he wrote to the Corinthians chapter 10:12, listen to what he says, “*Not that we dare to classify or compare ourselves to some of those who are commending themselves [there were self-proclaimed apostles that were troubling the church in Corinth and they attacked Paul's teaching and disparaged his character, so Paul says, I am not going to compare myself with those guys] but when they measure themselves by one another and compare themselves with one another they are without understanding.*” Jesus makes, actually the same point in the Sermon on the Mount, Matt. 6:24. What does Jesus say? “*No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and*

*love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money.”* Let me point out that you cannot serve God and the praise of men. This is why Jesus specifies in the forty first verse that He does not receive glory from people. If I am dependent upon the praise of men, who controls me: those whom I serve! I mentioned last week, Jesus draws His identity, his strength, his purpose, and his comfort from God, not from men. You might recall that in the second chapter of John verse 24 Jesus gave His estimation of man in general. This is what He said, “*Now when He was in Jerusalem at the Passover Feast, many believed in his name when they saw the signs that he was doing. But Jesus on his part did not entrust himself to them, because he knew all people and needed no one to bear witness about man, for he himself knew what was in man.*” So to whom do we bend our knee? Whose praise do we crave? Whose censure do we fear? [Is it] God’s or men’s?

I mentioned last week that we live in an increasingly hostile culture. If we continue to bend our knee to the culture, hoping they will approve of us, we will be increasingly enslaved to those who despise what we believe! Therefore at some point anyone in this room is going to have to make up their mind: whom do I love? That is indeed the question that Jesus is asking us all the time. Jesus hopes for but does not hope in men. There is a world of difference between those two kinds of hope. It is the same for us. Will we find our identity, strength, purpose and comfort in people or in God? That is the challenge before us. Do we serve for people’s praise or for God’s blessing?

It is a fundamental maxim or truth of Scripture that we become like what we actually worship, for true worship always reshapes the inner man or the soul. That is given to us in Psalm 115:4-8. This what David said, “*Their idols are silver and gold, the work of human hands. They have mouths, but do not speak; eyes, but do not see. They have ears, but do not hear; noses, but do not smell. They have hands, but do not feel; feet, but do not walk; and they do not make a sound in their throat. Those who make them become like them; so do all who trust in them.*” That truth is at the heart of Jesus’ words to the Pharisees in vv. 43-47 in John 5. If they truly worshiped God, Jesus says, they would pursue Jesus, because, Jesus has said, “The words I say and the works I do are just the words and the deeds of God.” There are two ways of validating Jesus’ claim. If Jesus is just like God, then people should be drawn to Jesus. So you ask the question, does Jesus teach what God teaches. The only way you can actually check that out is by becoming thoroughly acquainted with the Old Testament to see whether or not there is continuity between the one and the other. Long before, Moses had said God would bring another prophet to be with the Jews to be for the Jews. He would be just like Him. That prophet was described in Deuteronomy 18:15-19. This is what Moses said: “*The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brothers—it is to him you shall listen—just as you desired of the Lord your God at Horeb on the day of the assembly, when you said, ‘Let me not hear again the voice of the Lord my God or see this great fire anymore, lest I die.’ And the Lord said to me, ‘They are right in what they have spoken. I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers. And I will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him. And whoever will not listen to my words that he shall speak in my name, I myself will require it of him.’*” So the Jews had every reason to anticipate that someone would come along, like Jesus, and he would have a new authority to speak God’s words to them, and that that word would agree with the words which had come before [for God Himself never changes]. That is exactly what Jesus’s words did, and they said, “No!” Instead of seeking to know the God who spoke through Moses and all the prophets since, the Pharisees studied the words given by God as if they could master the words and so earn for themselves righteousness.

The second way of validating Jesus’ claim was whether or not Jesus does the works of God. As will be stated by a man born blind many verses later in John, 9:31, there was a man who was healed by Jesus who had been born blind. The Pharisees’ response to this man was accusation, not belief. They kept asking him: who healed you, how did he heal you? They were very angry because Jesus healed him on the Sabbath, and it was more important to them that He had healed him on the Sabbath, which he wasn’t supposed to do, than that He had healed him. Finally the man makes this comment: “*We know that God does not listen to sinners, but if anyone is a worshiper of God and does his will, God listens to him. Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a man*

*born blind. If this man were not from God, he could do nothing.”* But the Pharisees rejected the works that Jesus did.

I am going to switch our gears just a little bit. You and I, I hope, understand that the greatest of all the works that Jesus ever did is the work on the cross. Any reflection on the sweep of Scripture will tell us that there is no more characteristic work that describes or presents to us the true purpose of God. Jesus, we are told, laid down His life for the sins of the world. Of this work of Jesus, Paul wrote in Romans 6:15-17, the following: *“But the free gift is not like the trespass. For if many died through one man’s trespass – that would be Adam – much more have the grace of God and the free gift by the grace of that one man Jesus Christ abounded for many. And the free gift is not like the result of that one man’s sin. For the judgment following one trespass brought condemnation, but the free gift following many trespasses brought justification. If, because of one man’s trespass, death reigned through that one man, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ.”* I think we struggle understanding that. Doesn’t it seem to us that Adam’s one sin was so incredibly powerful that it brought condemnation to the whole human race thereafter? What could be more powerful than that? Our perspective, of course, is wrong. This is the right perspective. Every sin, every one of them, is worthy of death. So how great is the debt of our brokenness before God? The judgment of God does not stop at the point that we are saved. For the judgment of God is the Law of God and His holiness. Since the day of my salvation I can assure you I have committed many death-worthy sins, for every sin I have committed is death worthy! But here is the wonder of grace: the death of Jesus covers them all! That is why the grace is so much greater. The grace of God through the shed blood of Jesus not only covers all of us, but it covers all of the sins which all of us have committed so that we are no longer subject to the condemnation of death. Indeed beloved, the grace of God is great. The question, of course, is whether or not we have received that grace.

Let us pray: holy Father, we have taken a little time to look at a portion of Your Word, and to be exhorted by the word that we not fall into the trap of the Pharisees and assume that because we are those who read the Bible we are therefore those who love You and who walk by faith in the God of grace. Stir us up afresh with Your Spirit. May we marvel at Your grace, and may we be broken, humbled and restored by Your loving hand. We pray in Jesus’ name. Amen.

Questions for Understanding and Application:

1. The message speaks of the difference between “an informed mind” and “a changed heart”. Have you known people who seemed knowledgeable about the faith but lacked its graces?
2. Have you wondered if some people become Christians for what they can get rather than for being reconciled to the Lord?
3. Like any other earthly advantage, knowledge is a form of power and can be a source of pride. What are some of the ways knowledge can be misused, even knowledge of the scriptures?
4. Have you known people who were puffed up by what they knew? Is this limited to any sort of knowing or can it appear with all kinds of knowledge?
5. What new expressions of love and paths of service has your reading of the Word followed with prayer led you into?
6. “Reading the Word fails of its purpose if it does not draw us into a personal relationship with the Lord.” Has your reading the Bible brought you closer to the Lord? If not, what might be the problem and how might this be changed?
7. How can we rely on the spiritual gifts of others and yet continue to find our identity, strength, purpose and comfort in God rather than in people? Do we serve for people’s praise or God’s blessing?
8. If it is true that we become like what we worship, what do our lives say it is that we worship? Put differently, what is currently reshaping our souls after its image?