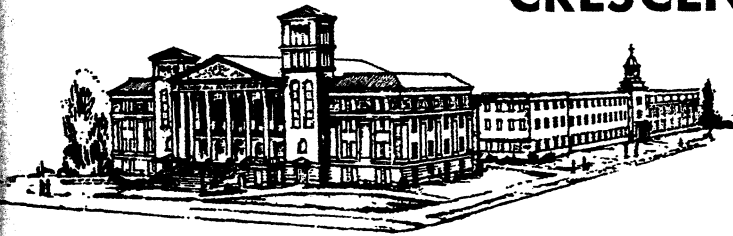


CRESCENT HILL BAPTIST CHURCH

SERMONS



"MINDING YOUR OWN BUSINESS"

Sunday Morning, January 22, 1961
John R. Claypool

One of the most refreshing characters in the New Testament is Simon Peter, "the Big Fisherman." I say this not because he was refined or sophisticated or a perfect saint, for in fact he was none of these. Rather, I say this because he was so human, so "down-to-earth," so similar to so many of us. If you have ever taken the time to get acquainted with this one, you will recognize in him that baffling mixture of opposites that is so characteristic of humanity. Here, wrapped up in one person, was a study in contrasts if there ever was one—strength and weakness, insight and blindness, high peaks and low valleys—they are all there in the life of Simon Peter. At one moment he was Jesus' star pupil, the next moment the biggest blunderer; there he is on the coast of Caesarea Phillipi—the first one to recognize who Jesus was; and then in the very next moment he is the object of Jesus' stern rebuke, "Get thee behind me, Satan (Matt. 16:13-23)." Or there after the Lord's Supper: Jesus prophesied that all of the disciples would turn their backs on him, and Peter jumped up and said, "I don't know about all of the rest, Lord, but not me. I will follow you unto death (Matt. 26:31-35)."

And then just a few short hours later this same voice was uttering curses and heatedly denying that he had ever known the Nazarene (Matt. 26:69-75). Yes, you see in Peter that which we see in ourselves when we are honest—this baffling mixture of "ups and downs," highs and lows, grandeur and misery. And this erratic pattern of vacillating was still operative the last time Peter met his Lord. I read about it a few minutes ago (John 21:9-23). Jesus had been crucified, buried, and resurrected; He had appeared to the disciples several times. One morning as the disciples were coming in from a fishing tour, they looked and saw Jesus preparing breakfast on the beach. Peter was so anxious to see his Lord that he dived in and swam ashore ahead of the other disciples. There on the beach takes place one of the tenderest scenes of the New Testament, for here Jesus fixes his gaze on Simon Peter and three times—one for each denial—asks Peter the simple question, "Simon Peter, do you love me?" Each time Peter responds in the affirmative and each time Jesus gives him a commission; He says, "Feed my sheep. Tend my lambs. Feed my sheep." And then Jesus makes a reference to the kind of death that Peter will die and as if to re-extend the hand of fellowship, He issues to Peter that first invitation, "Follow me." It was a moment of high glory—a moment when he who had denied his Master was reunited and reconciled in forgiveness. You would have thought that in such a moment surely the impetuous tongue of Simon Peter would be silenced; certainly in this moment of grandeur he would live on the high plane and not say something to spoil it. But no, it is the same old Peter. No sooner had Jesus given him a new commission than Peter turns around and sees John, the beloved disciple. And almost before he thinks what he is saying, he blurts out: "Jesus, what about this disciple? What will happen to him

and what is he to do?" And Jesus struck back with a swift rebuke. He said, "Peter, if it be my will that he remain until I return, what is that to you? Follow thou me."

To put this in modern language, Jesus said: "Peter, mind your own business. You have a commission; you have a job to do. Stop indulging in the kind of idle speculation about other people that keeps you from doing what you know you ought to do. Peter, mind your own business and get to the task that has been given to you." It is to this last rebuke that I want us to address ourselves this morning, for it seems to me that the temptation to which Peter succumbed and the rebuke of Christ point up a real temptation for every one of us and something that we might as well consider in our practical life. It is the temptation of letting our pre-occupation with other people keep us from discharging our own spiritual responsibility. It is possible to become so influenced and obsessed with the actions of those around us that we fail to fulfill our own spiritual destiny in the economy of God. Therefore this morning, I want to talk about Christian motivation and to think with you about how we can keep from making the same mistake that was made by Peter.

Now, this is a temptation for every person in this room. First of all, it is a temptation to the committed Christian—you who are already a member of the Church and who have responded to the revelation of God. It seems to me that it presents itself in two ways: First of all, it is very easy for the committed Christian to become so interested in reforming the sins of others that he uses this as an escape from his own inadequacy. Now, at the heart of Christianity there should be a serious concern both for other people and for right and wrong. However, out of these ingredients can grow such an obsession with the sins of others that we use this as an evasion for dealing with our own sins and reforming our own selves. I guess every preacher has had this frustration: he preaches a sermon, and somebody comes by with a big smile on their face and says, "Preacher, you really got them told today. I'm so glad so-and-so was here and got to hear that sermon." In other words, spiritual rebuke for this kind of person never has a personal reference. They can always see it in relation to someone else, but can never apply it to their own lives. I have my own label for this kind of person; I call them "pitchfork Christians." I can almost see them sitting through a sermon; as you toss out an idea, they mentally take it and throw it back over their shoulders to someone else, just like they would pitch a bale of hay. Do you know what I have found? I have found that until I let truth filter through my own experience, it is of very little value for anybody else. Before I can make a rebuke helpful to someone else, I must first of all have applied it to myself. And I know many Christian people who need first of all to take the Gospel into their own lives and let it work its good there before they become so interested in reforming the lives of other people. Did not the Master one day draw an almost preposterous caricature? Here is a man with a log sticking out of his own eye, trying to remove a speck of sawdust in the eye of someone else. Obviously one in that condition is not capable of performing the delicate eye surgery that is necessary in this case. The thing to do is to remove the beam from our own eye before we go out looking for specks of sawdust in others. Therefore, I think to the modern-day Simon Peter, Jesus would say, "Mind your own business. Don't become so interested in the sins of other people that you use this as an escape from your own sins." There is only one thing worse than having no concern for other people; that is having the wrong kind of concern. Therefore, to those who are tempted to use the sins of others as an escape from themselves, Jesus would say, "Mind your own business. Set your own house in order. Then perhaps you will have the compassion to be of help to another brother."

I think there is another way that this subtle temptation is very real to the Christian. If there is a tendency to use other people's sins as an escape from our own, there is also the very real temptation to use the ineffectiveness and mistakes of other people to diminish our own sense of responsibility. I know any number of people who at one time were very active in the church, and then something happened that they disliked and as a result they "threw the whole thing overboard" and stopped serving the Master altogether. Now, when we let other people influence what we are willing to do, we are making the same mistake that Peter was about to make. When we let the actions of other people diminish our own spiritual commitment, we are making a tragic mistake. I think we might as well be completely honest at this point. In a church this size there are going to be many people and many things that do not suit you exactly. There are going to be people in office, sermons preached, things done, and music played that do not exactly accord with what you would like. And yet if you let these differences cause you to relax your sense of spiritual endeavor, this is most lamentable. Let us get the matter clearly in focus. We are Christians because God has redeemed us in His grace. He has come and set us free from our sins and out of His grace has commissioned us to be His servants. In other words, our relationship is vertical; we have been redeemed by God and commissioned by God to do His work. If, then, with this kind of commission, we let the mistakes or problems of other people keep us from doing what He has commissioned us to do, we have confused the very basic authority under which we operate in the Christian faith. It is God that has given you your work; it is God who has called you to be faithful; and the fact that other people make mistakes is not an adequate evasion for your doing what you ought to do in the church. I think it is going to be rather sad when you stand before your Maker and He asks, "Why did not you help my struggling church when it needed all the resources that it could find?" And you answer, "Well, I didn't like the preacher.—I didn't like what so-and-so did." Those words are going to sound strangely irrelevant to the Christ who saved you and gave you your commission. You see, we are vertically related, and therefore we should be motivated by our feelings toward Him and not be deterred by the things that other people do.

The first church that I had as a Seminarian was down in Madison County, Kentucky. In this church was a deacon who had not darkened the door for twenty years. When I took the church I understood that he had had a misunderstanding years before with another deacon and had sworn never again to come inside the church. We desperately needed leaders, for the church was struggling for its life. I went and talked with this man one of the first Sundays that I was on the field. As soon as I introduced myself and told him why I had come, he launched into a tirade about this other man and said that he would never be associated with him. I was young and inexperienced—I do not know whether I would have courage enough to do it now—but I looked him straight in the eye and said, "Sir, I don't know whether what you are saying about that man is true or not; but I know one thing; you are responsible ultimately only to God. What you have said to me this afternoon is, in fact, irrelevant to the God who has called you and the Christ who has redeemed you. This church desperately needs all help it can find; it is not going to be excuse enough to stand before God and say that you didn't like 'so-and-so' or that you 'fell out' with somebody." Yes, it is the easiest thing in the world to rationalize our own spiritual ineffectiveness because of the ineffectiveness of others. But this is beside the point. Do you know what Jesus would say? "Modern-day Peter, mind your own business. What the other person does is ultimately not your responsibility. The question is this: what have you done with your responsibility? What have you done in discharging your obligation? Modern-day Peter, Mind your own business; you be faithful in your work regardless of what others do or fail to do!" Yes, this is a real temptation, both as an escape from our own sins and as an evasion of our spiritual responsibility.

But if this is a temptation to the committed Christian, I believe that it is an even greater temptation to the person who has never come to Christ. If you have ever tried to do any soul winning, I am certain that you will agree with me that the greatest single obstacle is this matter of hypocrisy in the church. In every church field there are some persons who rise up and point a finger at some member of the church and say, "At least I'm not a hypocrite like he is. At least I don't claim to be one thing when actually I am another." Yes, the greatest single handicap of the modern Church is that we have so many people who are not what they ought to be. Now, I would not for one moment take this matter of hypocrisy lightly. I think it is one of the most serious sins that a person can commit. Jesus said it was better that you had a millstone around your neck and be thrown into the depths of the sea than to lead one of these little ones astray. I say this morning to every person who has publicly confessed that he is a Christian that by the very name that you bear you have a tremendous responsibility. To claim publicly to be one thing when in truth you are something else is a matter of ultimate seriousness in the eyes of God. Therefore, I say that hypocrisy is a terrible sin.

But having looked at it from within the Church in all of its seriousness, I am constrained to say to the non-Christian that it is irrelevant as far as his relationship to Christ is concerned. Here again we have to do with a vertical relationship. A person is redeemed because Christ has died and God has apprehended him in grace. The fact that other people have not lived up to their responsibilities is not an adequate excuse for your turning your back on the Christ of the cross. Just as no man is saved by his own good works, neither is he saved by the sins of somebody else. One man's mistake will not atone for another's sin; you cannot excuse your failure to respond to Christ on the failure of somebody else. When you stand before Him, the thing that will concern Christ is not the failure of "the man down the street," the deacon who fails to live up to his profession, or the Sunday school teacher who "went bad." The only thing that will be important at that moment is this: what have you done with the Suffering Love that was seen at the cross? What have you done with the Love that was given to you and to which you could have responded and given yourself? And to any person who, for this reason, is not a Christian, let me take the words of Jesus to Simon Peter and say, "Non-Christian, mind your own business. What others fail to do is not excuse enough for your failure to come to the Christ."

This morning I have talked about something that is about as simple and practical as I think a preacher could discuss. We have talked about the motivation of Christian commitment. I have tried to make the point that every one of you knew before you came: namely, that we are ultimately related to God and therefore He must be the source of our commitment. I have warned the Christian of the mistake of using the sins of others as an evasion of his own sins and responsibilities. And I have said to the non-Christians that their responsibility is to respond to Christ and not to worry about the hypocrite. I want you to lay aside those things that would hold you back, see that which is most important, and respond to it.

I think the prophet Buddha is the one who told this story: Many centuries ago, a soldier was in battle. He was wounded by a deadly, poisonous arrow and he fell from his horse to the ground. The arrow was still deeply imbedded in his side, but the soldier began to ask a series of questions as he lay there on the ground. "I wonder what kind of wood this arrow is made of? These feathers—I wonder what kind of bird they came from? I wonder what type of person shot this arrow? Was he tall or short, light or dark?" And those who were standing around began to panic, and cried, "Man, what do all these questions matter? Pluck out the arrow, lest you die!" And somehow in all this chatter about other people and other sins

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I hear the voice of Christ saying, "What does all this matter? Peter, if it be my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you? Follow thou me." And I also hear Christ saying, "Christian, non-Christian, mind your own business. Do what you must do. Follow Me, lest you die!"