

FIVE FORKS BRETHREN IN CHRIST CHURCH

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SCRIPTURE: I Corinthians 4:2-5

DATE: October 28, 2018

LOCATION: Auditorium (Bill)

SERIES: Less of Me, More of You

SERMON: "When the Spotlight Finds You"

(Acknowledgment to "Anonymous", author of the book Embracing Obscurity.)

If you were here two weeks ago you might remember me talking about Jesus' childhood and how unremarkable it appears to have been. He grew up in Nazareth, and lived a pretty ordinary life it would seem...hung out with His family, studied the Scriptures, eventually became a carpenter.

But then it all began. He was baptized in the Jordan, asked a group of fishermen to join Him, did some preaching on occasion and then came Cana, where He performed His first miracle. And in and around Nazareth, Jesus began to get a bit of a reputation.

Then came this one Saturday when Jesus is teaching in a synagogue not too far from Nazareth, and it is going very well, everyone appears to have been locked in, impressed by His teaching.

All of the sudden, out of nowhere, the sound of a man's voice pierces the air, **"What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are – the Holy One of God!" (Mark 1:24)**

You know, that's pretty much going to put a damper on things. I imagine the room got very quiet very quickly. And there's no way Jesus can just ignore this and keep going. And I imagine everyone in the room is wondering what is Jesus going to do?

Well, Jesus looked straight at the man and commanded that the evil spirit in him to be quiet...and come out of the man. The man's body shook violently, the people heard the spirit shriek as it left the man.

And if the people were impressed by Jesus's teaching, they were even more amazed at His power to give orders to evil spirits, who would actually obey Him. And so...

Mark 1:28 News about him spread quickly over the whole region of Galilee.

And just like that, Jesus found Himself in the spotlight. Now look, this month we have talked about how Jesus would intentionally embrace a certain degree of obscurity throughout His 3 years of ministry. But when the spotlight *did* find Him, He would embrace it in all the right ways for all the right reasons.

This morning we wrap up our October Sermon Series called ***Less Of Me, More of You***. For the past 3 weeks we have been talking about moving in the opposite direction of our culture...a culture that appears to crave the spotlight. "Follow *me* on Twitter." "Like' *me* on Facebook."

For the past 3 weeks we've been trying to wrap our minds around this concept of – instead of chasing the spotlight – we look to embrace obscurity instead. Not that we don't matter, but so that the primary purpose of our lives is not to make much of ourselves.. but much of God.

Now, sometimes - and it's just inevitable - the spotlight is going to find us. And when it does, we want to embrace it in all the right ways, for all the right reasons.

Our message for this morning is titled, ***"When The Spotlight Finds You"***.

And so we're going to begin by talking about **Overcoming the Danger** of the Spotlight...and close by putting the spotlight on **The Hope that We Have**.

1. OVERCOMING THE DANGER OF THE SPOTLIGHT

It's bound to find us. And if we aren't prepared for it, we can end up not only embarrassing ourselves, but causing great damage to the church and to His name.

Back in the early 90's, before I became a Pastor here at FF, I actually managed a jewelry store. I had been with this company for about 5 years and every year they had a Christmas party where they would give out these awards, with the final and most prestigious award given out last, the one recognizing the "Associate of the Year."

I remember the name of the winner of the award that first year, his name was Charles Azapour. Out of the hundreds of employees he received this special award, and as he went forward to receive his award and share some words, I remembered sitting there thinking, "Man, how good *that* must feel." And knowing how unlikely it was that I would ever experience anything like that.

Well, five years pass and about a month before that year's dinner, my supervisor tells me that I had been selected by the executives of the company as that year's winner. He wasn't to have told me, and I didn't believe Him at first, but *it gave me time to prepare for a moment in the spotlight*. I wanted to make sure I recognized those that I worked with, but more than that, I didn't want to miss the chance to make much of God, so I shared a verse that has always been meaningful to me, from Proverbs... **"In all your ways acknowledge Him and He shall direct your paths" (Proverbs 3:6)**

I have no idea what I would have said if my supervisor hadn't tipped me off. I'm so thankful I had the chance to be prepared. If I hadn't...in the moment I could have easily overlooked God's role in my life and just talked about myself. There was even a part of me that would have rather not won, than have to go up and speak in front of so many people.

But sometimes the spotlight finds us, even when we are looking to embrace obscurity. And when it does...and if it goes well...the danger is, we might find that we like it. We might find that we like it too much.

It looks like this is what happened in the life of Saul, Israel's first king.

God chose Saul - this young man who came from the smallest of the 12 tribes that made up the nation of Israel - to be the very first king of all 12 tribes. Now Saul himself was very tall, his height set him apart from other men.

Now when God called Saul to be king, he was not seeking the spotlight. On the day that he was announced as king, Saul couldn't be found because he was hiding among some baggage.

After being made king and thrust into the spotlight, things were fine at first. But eventually being in the spotlight got the best of him. He became more of a tyrant than a king, he disobeyed a direct command given by God and tried to gloss over it, and ultimately built a monument to make much of himself...his name and his accomplishments. Because of this, and more, Saul ultimately lost the throne, and eventually, his life.

Remember 2 weeks ago we talked about how Humility Comes Before Honor? Jesus humbled Himself to the point of death on a Cross before he was exalted to the highest place and given the name that is above every name. In Saul's case, it was honor before humiliation.

Saul didn't seek the spotlight. But it found him. And he didn't handle it well once it did.

What about us? What if we don't set out seeking the spotlight, but we experience success in some facet of life? Maybe at work, perhaps here in the church...we never would have expected it, but we find ourselves with increasing amounts of influence. Others are noticing us, listening to us and acting on our input.

And all of this could be happening simply because of our performance. We're getting things done. Or It *could* be because of *how we carry ourselves...* with humility and integrity.

We didn't expect it, we didn't anticipate it, we didn't seek it, but God was with us and we found out that, "Hey, I can do this" and not only do this, do it so well that people notice. And they'll tell you that they've noticed.

It can feel more than pretty good, and as I've said before, we should be absolutely thrilled about the gifts that God has given us and the opportunity to use them. At the same time, we

must be aware of how easy it is to begin to make too much of ourselves...the potential for pride to take root and to grow during our moments in the spotlight. (*Lord, don't allow me to ever become famous...*)

And so here are 3 things to remember in **overcoming the danger of the spotlight**. First...

A. Remember Your Roots

You may recall from I Corinthians chapter 1 what we were when we were first called by God...

I Corinthians 1:26b Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth.

The whole reason that God chose you and I in the first place – as non-influential as we were – was so that we would never find ourselves in a position to boast about ourselves.

I never want to forget that I was nothing and I mean nothing when God called me. I owe Him everything...my wife Karen...my daughter Olivia...my role here at Five Forks...I deserve none of this and there are times in my life where I say to God, *"How in the world did this happen? Why have You done all of this for me? I wanted nothing to do with You...and yet You kept on calling me until I came.*

If I ever start to think that all that I have is because of me (*how I turned my life around*)...all I need to do is remember by roots. It's just one step in **overcoming the danger of the spotlight**. Here's a second step...

B. Remember Your Purpose

You know what makes this so very difficult? We are living in a time and a place where we are bombarded by messages telling us that life all about us.

It comes from the media in the form of commercials and advertisements that are out to convince you that your primary purpose is to be happy, whatever it takes...and to find pleasure

in whatever you choose to do. And much of what makes us happy and brings us pleasure is just fine...and much of what brings us pleasure is flat out sin.

But for the most part, this culture does not differentiate between the two. Whatever it takes for you to be happy.

We not only hear the message that “life is all about us” from the media, but we indirectly hear it from our friends. They’re our friends! Our friends are loyal to us, that’s what makes them our friends. Our friends want to support us and defend us and even if they mean well...their support of us can muddy the waters when it comes to our primary purpose.

You are my friends, and so this is probably as good a time as any to talk about what is “good” and is “dangerous” about being up here on stage. This whole series has been somewhat of a challenge because the whole time I’m up here talking about embracing obscurity, *I’m up here*. I’m anything but obscure, and so you see irony.

But as I said before, we all will have moments in the spotlight, it’s about embracing these moments in all the right ways for all the right reasons.

The right way and the right reason to be up here is to point everyone in here to Jesus...and I couldn’t be more sincere in my desire to make much of Jesus and point everyone in here to Him. At the same time, I couldn’t be in any more danger.

Because it sure feels good to be told – by you, my friends – that I have brought a sermon where you sensed God speaking to you. You as a congregation are very encouraging and all of us get that from time to time. But if I start looking for words of encouragement it, then it becomes about me and I can end up losing sight of my purpose.

My purpose is not to receive your praise.

My purpose is not to memorize much of the message in order to somehow impress.

My purpose is not to have you laugh at any jokes I might tell.

My purpose - on this stage, off of this stage, wherever I find myself - is to make much of God, not of myself.

And while you may be aware or unaware of the challenges that I imagine every pastor faces...God knows exactly the battle taking place within us. And so here are some words that I always need to keep in front of me...

I Corinthians 4:5b He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of men's hearts. At that time each will receive his praise from God.

Here's the thing, and you already know this...while this stage presents both opportunities and danger...so it is with all of you wherever you find yourself each and every day.

It was Shakespeare who first said it, but some of you might be more familiar with the Canadian band Rush who sang about how "All the world's a stage..."

The point is, we will all find ourselves on the stage and in the spotlight.

At work. Here in the church. In the shops and in the stores. On the field or on the court or in the stands. In the confines of our home. When the spotlight is on us and our children are listening and our co-workers are listening...when anyone is listening...what are we going to be about?

Remember your purpose is to make His name great.

Okay, to ***overcome the danger of the spotlight***, you remember your roots, remember your purpose, and finally...

C. Remember Your Limitations

When you find yourself in the spotlight, when people are coming to you and looking to you for your thoughts, don't you sometimes feel as if you need to have all the right answers?

Nobody has all the answers. And so it's good to remember your limitations.

There's a really good example of this in the Scriptures. In the days of the early church – the book of Acts tells of these local congregations being started throughout the Mediterranean world - there was this man by the name of Apollos and he was one of the most gifted public speakers in the early church. But when he was confronted with the fact that there were serious shortcomings in his preaching, he was very humble, and willingly received instruction from this tentmaker and the tentmaker's wife...both of whom were grounded in their faith and their knowledge.

Don't allow the spotlight to make you feel the pressure to have all the answers. You won't, and you don't need to apologize for it...it's okay.

All this to say, that the **spotlight can be dangerous**, but the danger is lessened when we remember our roots, remember our purpose and remember our limitations.

I'd like to close this message by turning the spotlight off of us, and turning the spotlight onto *the one thing it will take*, that will motivate us to go in a totally different direction than many around us. And that one thing is...

2. THE HOPE THAT WE HAVE

Think about how you would answer this question: *“Of all the things that you have accomplished in life, which one was the hardest to do?”*

Some of you might say “The hardest thing I've ever done was get my degree.” Some you would say, “Getting out of debt.” Giving birth? Reaching out and extending forgiveness to someone who hurt you terribly?

Next question: *“What made you do it? What was in it for you?”*

And I would bet the most common answer would be ***the hope of what lies ahead.***

The hope of being able to obtain a job in a certain field because of your degree. The hope of debt-free living, where you are not beholden to a creditor. The hope for a daughter or son. The hope of being reconciled with a family member or friend.

Through all the hard work and sacrifice that it took to pull it off, it was the hope of what was ahead that drove us and motivated us.

It's always good to keep thinking about what lies ahead for those of us that have made this commitment to follow Jesus. Who also knew what it was like to look ahead.

We're told in Hebrews 12:2 to fix our eyes on Jesus, **"...who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of God."**

Jesus endured the humiliation and the pain of the Cross – enduring pain beyond what you and I could ever imagine - because of the future joy that awaited Him. This included being seated beside His Father for all eternity.

In the same way, are you aware of what lies before you? And are you willing to make sacrifices that many around you simply are not willing to make...because of the hope of what lies ahead?

When I think of looking to and planning for what lies ahead, I often think of what Jesus teaches in His Sermon on the Mount...

Matthew 6:19-20 Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal.

Treasures on earth...Treasures in heaven.

You know, throughout my life I have numerous "Favorite T-Shirts". You know what I'm talking about? They were my treasures on earth.

Fit great, comfortable as all get out...and I would wear them until the fabric started breaking down and I could no longer wear them in public. But I'd continue to wear them around the house – holes and rips and tears here and there - because I loved those shirts and just couldn't bring myself to throw them out. It was always a sad day when there was virtually nothing left to wear.

The point that Jesus is making here and what we know to be true, those things we accumulate and can wear on our bodies and hang on our walls and drive around in...they are simply "things" and "things" don't last forever. It's futile and foolish for me to put my hope in any of my things.

But there are things that we can't hold in our hands – treasures in heaven...but you know what? They don't wear out and they cannot be taken from us.

Making less of ourselves and making more of God...that's something we can't hold in our hands...but every time we lay aside the temptation to promote ourselves and instead make much of God, we are laying up treasures in heaven.

The kingdom of God is now here and I have no trouble admitting that I love much of what this life has to offer. I love taking walks with my family and the sound of ocean waves crashing on the shore. I love feeling the warmth of the sun on my face and the thrill I get when my favorite teams win a game. I love sitting down to a plate full of sweet corn and I love singing certain worship songs that help me grasp all that Jesus has done for me.

But I know that these things are just a taste of what's to come...the walks will be better and the waves will sound mightier and the corn will taste sweeter.

And even more than that, just the fact that I will be in Jesus presence and actually see Him with my own eyes should give me every reason to make less of myself in order to make more of Him. ***This is the real hope that I have.***

If you are with me on this...if you have sat here these past four Sundays and have felt God's Spirit speaking to you about a change of focus that extends to your heart...then how do we keep this concept – Less of Me, More of You – before us?

There is a passage in the Psalm 39 that I'm going to read and encourage you to bookmark, in order to go back to it whenever you are losing sight of ***the hope that you have***. The hope that allows you to make less of yourself and more of Him...

Psalm 39:4-7 “Show me, O Lord, my life's end and the number of my days; let me know how fleeting is my life. You have made my days a mere handbreadth; the span of my years is as nothing before you. Each man's life is but a breath.

Man is mere phantom as he goes to and fro: He bustles about, but only in vain; he heaps up wealth, not knowing who will get it.

But now, Lord, what do I look for? *(Where is this hope that I have?)*

My hope is in you.”

PRAYER