***Sermon Series: Experiencing God***

**Sermon #1 – Looking for God Every Day!**

Isaiah 6:1-8, John 21:15-17

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| **Slides** | **Sermon** |
| 1 | Title Slide |
| 2 | Introduction  On January 1st, it is common to make New Year’s resolutions. How many of you did that this year?   * Did you limit them to at most 3? * Did you write them down? * Did you share them with anyone else? * Did you find a partner that adopted the same resolutions? * Did you and this partner agree to hold each other accountable?   If you made resolutions and had so many and didn’t write them down, didn’t tell anyone else what they were nor found a partner to hold you accountable, hopefully in a loving way, then I’ll bet a sizable sum that you will fail. And fail before the end of January!  Why do I say this? Because almost 90-95% of people who make New Year’s resolutions stop them by at least the third month; many even before that date.  Why is keeping New Year’s resolutions so hard? Most are unreasonable to start with, most have too many, most do not tell anyone much less secure an accountability partner. And even the ones that have someone for accountability, even those people eventually cut each other some slack because they both experience how hard it is to keep up the resolutions. |
| 3 | So let’s be clear from the start that experiencing God is not a new way to make resolutions for a new year! No, experiencing God is about knowing and doing the will of God. This series will be based on the book first written in 1991 by Henry Blackaby. It has been revised and chapters added with the oldest son contributing to it. This series will deal with many issues that keep us from experiencing God.  And I am convinced this is the number one desire for me and all people whether they realize it or not. All people want to know where they fit in, to whom they belong, where they can receive joy and assurance, and that their life has purpose and meaning. Also, I believe we are all looking for the sense that we will be okay now, in the future, and at the time of our death.  The key to getting positive, real answers to these desires will come from our relationship with God as we experience God in our day-to-day life. |
| 4 | One of the issues that came out of my evaluation in November and December is that I, and we as a church, need to start paying more attention to the way God is at work in our lives. I think that if we regularly attend to looking for God’s action in our lives we will be drawn closer to God. Now, at first I dare say many will look back at a given day and not see God at all! Don’t let that trouble you because when we are used to living on our own terms then it will be difficult at first to see God at all. So, that will be a challenge. But don’t let that stop you from spending a few moments each day looking for God’s presence. God’s presence is all around you – his guidance, his truth, his leading in your life are available to you. Are you *looking?* Are you *listening*?  Even if we don’t see or feel it, God’s presence is there! I promise you! |
| 5 | Now, I believe God is very interested in building a personal relationship with me, with you, and everyone in the world. That’s why Jesus, God’s incarnation, came to earth and died for our sins. If we believe on Jesus then the barrier between God and us is broken and we can have a personal relationship with God. And no sin can stand against the sacrifice of Jesus and God’s desire for a relationship with us. Jesus has a wonderful way of restoring us when we fail Him.   * He does not humiliate us. * He does not chastise us. * He does not ask us to make a resolution to try harder.   Jesus takes us aside and asks us to reaffirm our belief in Him.  **Ex.)** Peter failed Jesus miserably when he fled with the other disciples from the Garden of Gethsemane. Later Peter denied that he even knew Jesus in the courtyard – 3 times in fact. Peter must have wondered if he was capable of being Jesus’ disciple after being so blatantly unfaithful.  Have you ever been where Peter was? Have you been so unfaithful and disobedient that you wonder how is it possible to get beyond the unfaithfulness and disobedience and restore your relationship with God?  As we begin 2022, you may be painfully aware of the way you have failed Jesus. Maybe you were unfaithful. Perhaps you knowingly disobeyed His words to you. Perhaps you denied Him by the way you lived. |
| 6 | The Good News is that you do not have to stay estranged from God. When Peter found himself in that position, Jesus did not berate him, nor call him out in front of the other disciples. No, Jesus asked Peter 3 times, “Peter, do you love me?”  Jesus will do the same for us. He will ask us to examine our love and devotion to Him. And if we truly love Jesus, then we will obey Him and do His commands.  Jesus does not need our resolutions, our excuses, nor our promises to try harder this year. If you resolved to obey Him last year and it did not help you be faithful, then it will not make you be successful this year. Jesus asks us to love Him. If we truly love Jesus, our service for Him, unlike last year, will be of the quality he desires.  As we start 2022, will we devote ourselves to focus on loving Jesus and look for the ways God is working in our world? |
| 7 | In the Isaiah passage, we heard about Isaiah being in the Temple of God. I think when he entered the temple, Isaiah had a pretty good feeling about his own holiness because he was one of the few in Israel that really sought to know and do God’s will. Compared to the kings and other leaders of Israel, I would say Isaiah was miles ahead of them.  But when he experienced God in the temple, he was confronted with how misguided and self-absorbed he was. When experiencing the glory and power of God, the scripture says that Isaiah was “undone” meaning he realized how sinful he was compared to our Holy God. Isaiah said, “he was a man of unclean lips and lived in the midst of a people with unclean lips.” And God used the image of a burning coal to cleanse his lips and life. |
| 8 | So what does this say to us about starting a new year and experiencing God?  First, it says “an exalted view of God brings a clear view of sin and a realistic view of self. A diminished view of God brings a reduced concern for sin and an inflated view of self.” Isaiah’s encounter with God made him immediately and keenly aware of his own unholiness and the sin of those around him as he worshiped God in the temple.  It is impossible for us to worship God and remain unchanged. The best indication you have truly worshiped is a changed heart.  Have we so conformed ourselves to a sinful world that we are satisfied with unholy living? Have we sunk so far below God’s standard that when someone does live as God intended we consider that person “super spiritual”? If we only compare our personal holiness to those around us, we may be deceived into believing that we are living a consecrated life. Yet, when we encounter holy God, our only response can be, “Woe is me.” |
| 9 | So, what do we learn from this passage?  We will not see those around us trusting in Jesus until we recognize a clear difference between us and the rest of the world. God wants to sanctify us as He is holy. When God deals with us, there is a radical degree of purity about our life that is absolutely different from what the world can produce.  The world, including those close to us, will be convinced you serve a holy God by your consecrated life.  While this is something we strive for, it can’t become reality until we start at the beginning. And that is loving Jesus and letting Jesus into the center of our hearts! |
| 10 | This year I’m not making resolutions that I will break before February 1st. I am going to look for ways God is working in life. I’m going to put my efforts in living my life so close to Jesus that I will experience God in my life and begin to know God’s will more clearly. Not only for me but for Center.  Will you join me and consciously start looking for God working each and every day? Will you join me in looking to Jesus as your savior and mentor so that you too can know and experience God working in and through you? We are starting on a life-changing journey. I hope you will be a part of it. Amen |