

## Unseen Sound Week 4

### Echoes of the Kingdom

By Pastor Mandy Barkhaus

So as we continue on this sermon series and we we're for thinking kind of about ourselves and our own actions, it's like, but what about all the rest that's going on? But I do believe that God wants us to start right here in our own, in our own hearts, and take time to pause, to think about what's going on in in our own world.

So I want you to think about these couple of examples you might recognize or you might have seen before, or maybe you even experienced yourself. There's a young woman who starts every morning with her Bible, her Bible, her journal, steaming cup of coffee. And every day she carefully arranges them on this table that's next to the window.

The light's coming in just right, and she snaps a photo. Sometimes there's a verse highlighted in her Bible. Other times there's a word in her journal like faith or grace. And then she posts this photo with a hashtag, maybe hashtag morning devotionals or hashtag blessed, or hashtag Jesus first. And this post gets likes and hearts and comments. People say so inspiring in your goals.

But what people don't see is after the photo is posted, the Bible is closed, the coffee gets cold, the journal. The rest of the journal pages remain blank. There is this appearance of devotion. It has replaced the actual practice of the devotion. There's a man who wears a cross necklace every single day. He never misses a Sunday morning worship.

He volunteers when he can and he post about it. Now, social media is full of Bible quotes over mountain scenes and worship clips of worship songs, and he posts things like God is good all the time and people say, wow, what a strong man of faith. But what they don't see is that his Bible hasn't been opened in weeks.

His prayers are mostly public ones and rarely any prayers are said in private. And then when life gets messy, instead of leaning on God, he gets angry and he takes it out on others or he leans on distractions like work or hobbies or just noise. He's built this reputation of devotion and service, but it's actually not a relationship with God.

The appearance of faith has replaced the pursuit of God. Now, there's nothing wrong with posting, pictures online or sharing your faith online or wearing a cross necklace, but Jesus asks us today in our scripture, are you doing these things for God's eyes or for your followers eyes? True worship isn't staged. It's not filtered. It's real. It's raw.

It's sometimes quiet. So we're still in the sermon on the Mount, but now we are in, chapter six of Matthew where Jesus says, be careful that you don't practice your religion in front of people to draw their attention. If you do, you will have no reward from your father who is in heaven. So first of all, Jesus is telling us to be careful, to be careful, right?

To be alert to be cautious. He is not saying be careful of what's outside of the church. He's saying be careful about what's inside, what's within. And this is a continuation of last weekend's message, where we're pointing the fingers at ourselves. So Jesus says, be careful because there's a real danger of trading real devotion to God for this image that we might have.

And the danger is that we will have no reward from God in heaven. So if your goal is to impress people, Jesus warns, well, you've already received that word reward. That's all you're going to get. Now, the Greek word that Jesus says, Jesus uses, is the word, the Greek word *chōsen* and it means righteousness or justice.

But in this translation it's translated to religion. So be careful that you don't practice your religion in, in front of people to draw their attention. Now, the word religion can stir up a lot of feelings. You've probably heard someone say, well, I'm spiritual, but not religious. Now, for many, religious or religion is tied to rules and regulations and institutions and even sometimes painful experiences.

So while organized religion has done a lot of great things, we've built hospitals and started schools and started many, many non-profits, and led many people to Jesus, organized religion. We also have to recognize has done some real harm. So I get while people are like, I'm going to stay away from that word. But Jesus, you know, in this translation, Jesus is using the word religion, right?

So be careful not to practice your religion. But if Jesus did mean religion when he said this Greek word, he wasn't talking about broken systems or outward rituals. Instead, he was talking about something more personal. So this kind of religion isn't a it is a set of practices and rhythms and choices that we make in order to align us with God's heart.

That's what Jesus is talking about. It's how we love God and how we love our neighbor. So Jesus was talking about something much more personal. Much more personal. It's how we seek judge justice. It's how we live rightly. It's how we stay grounded in grace. Now, other translations will replace the word religion with righteousness in this passage. And it's the same Greek word that Jesus used in our Scripture passage last week where Matthew 520, where he says, I say to you that unless your righteousness is greater than the righteousness of the legal experts in the Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

So whether we call it righteousness or justice or religion, it's not about performance. It's about relationship. Right relationship with God, right relationship with others, and even right relationship with ourselves. God doesn't care about showy displays of what we do in public. God is inviting us into something deeper, and what he's inviting us into is a daily, honest, humble connection.

That's what Jesus is saying that we need to be doing. So this takes practice. It says be careful not to practice your religion in front of people to draw attention. So Jesus says, right. Don't practice your religion. And here's some practices that you can use. Jesus says, this, whenever you give to the poor, don't blow your trumpet as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, so that they may get praise from you.

I assure you, that's the only reward they'll get, right? Don't be boastful. Jesus is saying, Jesus says, when you practice prayer, when you pray, don't be like the hypocrites. They love to stand. Pray. Standing in the synagogues and on the street corners so that people will see them. I assure you, that's the only reward they'll get. Jesus says about the practice of fasting and when you fast, don't put on a sad face like the hypocrites.

They distort their face so people will know that they are fasting. I assure you that they have their reward. So after each one of these, then Jesus, invites us into something more, right? He invites us into something more, he invites us into privacy and honesty and presence with God. And so he says things like this. When you give to the poor, when you do give to the poor, don't let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that you may give to the poor in secret.

Jesus says, then he says this. But when you pray, go to your room, shut the door, and pray to your father who is present in a secret place. And then when you fast, don't put on a sad face like the hypocrites. They distort their faces so people will know they're fasting. But. But Jesus says, when you fast, brush your hair and wash your face so that, your father, who sees in secret will reward you.

So it's not that public worship is bad. It's not that public service and caring for people and having devotion in public is bad. Scripture is full of examples where people gather to worship, but private worship is foundational, our most important, and sometimes even our most meaningful, moments of worship are the ones that no one else sees.

So worship or religion or devotion is more than just Sunday morning. It's a daily attention to God, daily attention to God. That is what Jesus is asking us to do. Scripture is brilliant in giving us examples of what we shouldn't do and the consequences with those. So here's a fun example. Let me set the scene. The scene is found in and in the book of acts.

And in the early church, generosity was overflowing, right? Generosity was overflowing. People in the early church, they sold their property and gave it to the apostles to give to the poor. And so that though no one in their community was without need, right. They this generosity was just flowing. And it was a beautiful, sacred moment of shared worship.

This is what real and sacrificial, faith and action looks like. So here's the scene. Beautiful moment of shared worship. Enter Ananias and Sapphira in Acts chapter five. They sell land just like, other people did. But instead of giving the full amount, they secretly held part of it back. And they walk in and they make a big presentation, and they kneel at the feet of the apostles, putting their offering down.

And they act as if they are giving everything up. They want the recognition of full devotion without actually sacrificing. So Peter confronts Ananias and Sapphira, their husband and wife, and the husband comes in first and he confronts them. And then the wife comes in and Peter confronts her, not because they didn't give enough, but because they lied about it, because they were worshipping approval of people.

While pretty tending to worship God. So God responded. God responds in this story, and the story ends tragically for Ananias and Sapphira read it. Acts chapter five. This is a really important reminder for us. It's an important reminder that that God doesn't want our performance. God wants our honesty, our image does not fool God. God sees our heart.

God knows what our private devotional life looks like. God knows what happens behind closed doors. So what does God want from our hearts? Let's use baseball as an example because it's baseball season, right? Which, if we're honest, it's pretty much all year. But, it's also the College World Series. And I mean, having, you know, I grew up most of my life was lived most of my life in, in Omaha.

So like the college World Series is a big deal. I didn't go to a lot of games, but like, there was stuff happening around Omaha. So it's kind of a big deal. Side note, did you know that horizons this year has a men's softball, team there? They play in a church league on Monday nights. And as of today, let's just say they're either in first place or last place, but I'm not going to say which one because I don't want to jinx them.

I'm sure I'll hear something from the, the, the softball guys on that one, but but it's a church league, so it's not about winning or losing, right? It's just about, having love and grace for each other. Yeah. Okay, now I know I'm going to hear something from them. Okay. So life in baseball. When we think of life, we often think about moving from point A to point B.

We're born and we die. We want to advance and grow and move up in the world and go forward. We want to go from one place to another. But baseball, a baseball game, is a little

bit different, and a baseball game is kind of like a healthy faith journey. When a player steps up to bat, they start at home plate.

That's point A, and if they're skilled or lucky, they run the bases right. They go to first base and then second base and then the third base. And their goal isn't to run fast or impress the crowd. The goal is to get back to where they started. They want to come home. That is the goal in baseball.

So you run from point A, back to point A. We think about our faith life. We started out with God. We were created by God in love, and we were known and we were seen and then we start running. We run towards success and recognition and approval. We chase applause and affirmation from our family and our friends and the social media world and social media and just the world in general.

But somewhere along the way, when we're running for these things, we realize that all of this running doesn't satisfy us, it doesn't bring us any peace, and it certainly doesn't bring any lasting reward. So what is this reward? Jesus keeps pointing it out. It's he's like, if you do this, you'll have no reward, right? And no reward from God in the kingdom.

And you, you read all throughout the Scripture where Jesus talks about this, this reward of the kingdom of heaven. It's not attention, that's not applause, but this reward is a deep spiritual transformation that happens when we live for God and not for the crowd. White. We leave home so that we can come back home. So the reward is coming home to God, to God's presence, to God's peace.

It's time we come home to God's purpose for our life, and we don't have to die in order to experience the Kingdom of heaven. We can experience it. Now, if you think about the father, in the story of the prodigal son, where, where the god's the same way, right? God's not keeping score. He's watching with love.

He's ready to embrace you. Not because you performed, but because he wants you back. That's the real reward. Not applause, not performance, but being home with God. So today, you know, maybe it's like, maybe you're like, okay, now it's time to stop running for approval. It's time for me to stop thinking about what others think about me or what you know, what may or may how I may be appearing outwardly.

Or maybe it's time that we come back to where we started to come home to the only place that we've ever truly belong. And we do that by noticing God. We do that by remembering God every day, every day. We have to do this all throughout the day. We have to remember God. And one way that we can do this is to practice.

Right. And one of the things that we can do to practice this is by doing the daily examen. The daily examen is a spiritual practice developed by Saint Ignatius of Loyola, and he was a Spanish priest and a theologian who founded the Society of Jesus, or the Jesuits in the 1500s. And he was a soldier. He was a soldier who wanted to be the hero.

That is what he wanted. He wanted to be a battle hero. But God got his attention with a cannonball that took off his leg. And while he was recovering, he experienced God in a new way. He grew in his spiritual formation, and he became to believe that God could be found in all things, not just in church, not just in formal prayer, but in the details of everyday life.

Every day. So Ignatius wanted to help people cultivate, a deeper awareness of God's presence throughout their day. So he created this daily examen as this tool for spiritual growth. It's not like a prayer of confession or petition. The examen isn't about checking a box or, feeling guilty about what we've done or we haven't done, but it's really about reflecting with honesty and grace to notice that how God has been active in your life and how you've responded or haven't responded.

So at the heart, the examined the daily examen is a practice of awareness and growth and gratitude. So worship is where we give God our attention. That's what worship is. We are. We are giving God our attention. And the examen helps us to pay attention daily. Because worship is more than just Sunday morning. We should be paying attention to God every single day.

Now, whether you're religious, or spiritual but not religious, or you're simply just trying to seek clarity and gratitude in your life, the examen offers a beautiful rhythm to recenter your heart and reset your focus. So usually you do the examen at the end of the day, but you can do it at the beginning of the day as well.

You can do it at lunchtime. You pick a time, a day that works for me, for you, because it's a rhythm and a practice that you want to do every day. Now, hopefully you received a card on your way in. If you're. If not, they'll have them on the way out that you can you can, look at this.

But this is a great way to be put this somewhere where you can do this every single, single day. Try to find a spot in your house before you go to bed or first thing in the morning, or maybe when you're at work, maybe you take a walk on one of your breaks and just for ten minutes, do this daily examen.

If you pray the examen regularly, if it becomes part of your daily routine, what happens is you'll begin to notice God not just at the end of the day, but you'll. But right there in the middle of the day. And over time, your whole day becomes a kind of prayer, what the Jesuits call a contemplative in action. And so to wrap up this sermon on authentic worship and

devotion in the quietness of our minds, we're going to do the examen in quiet moments like this.

And we have times where we reflect and there's not a lot of voices or noise happening. It can be, uncomfortable at times. So we're going to find a comfortable position, and we're going to think about the last 24 hours of your day as we walk through this version of the five steps of the daily examen. So first, take a deep breath.

Think about the presence of God.

And remember that God is with you right now.

And ask God for the grace to see the last 24 hours of your day through God's eyes.

Gratitude. What are 2 or 3 things from yesterday that you're truly thankful for? They can be big or small, but remember them. And thank God.

Review. Review. The last 24 hours. Walk back through your day. When did you feel close to God? When did love show up? What moments stand out to you? So think about yesterday morning around 9 or 10:00. What was happening? When did you see God?

Think about lunchtime and early afternoon. What do you remember?

About what happened.

Now. Afternoon and into supper time. When did God show up?

Think about right before bed. What happened?

What moments stand out?

And then overnight into this morning. Well, you. When you woke up and got ready for church. When did you feel close to God?

Now we move on to sorrow. We're humans. We mess up. And you probably thought about a time over the last 24 hours. Where you missed the mark. Where you acted out of fear or anger or pride. Talk to God honestly about it. Say you're sorry. Ask for healing.

And finally. Grace. Look ahead to the next 24 hours. Where might you need help? Ask God for the grace to face whatever is coming with courage, kindness, and love.

Gracious God, thank you for this moment.

That you've given us to just pause.

To read the scripture where Jesus is encouraging us to be quiet more. To worship you in silence, more.

We pray that we will continue to worship you every single day, to not miss the moments where you show up. To be grateful for you and all that you do for us.

Help us to get into a rhythm where our hearts begin to soften. Where our love for you begins to grow.

Where our love for our neighbor and for ourselves strengthens.

God, thank you for today. Thank you for tomorrow. Thank you for everlasting life. And we say all of this in Jesus's name. Amen.