



Read both passages. This morning's message is the last in a sermon series where we've been looking at what Jesus might say to some famous people – Santa Claus, the Beatles, Bill Gates, and Taylor Swift. Those are well-known people. They're people who have won the attention, the adoration, respect, and imagination of the world's population. They're people we lift up and put on pedestals because of what they do and what they have done; the public spotlight shines on them regularly.

Do you know, however, that God's spotlight continually shines on each of us? As those these folks we've looked at, and countless others who have captivated the attention and hearts of people around the globe... **The people of the globe, such as you, have captured the attention and the heart of God.**

To help us understand this better, we are going to engage in a congregational experimental activity. Now, this is not going to feel very "churchy" for a few minutes, but bear with me. There's a Biblical point I want to make with this. Out in the lobby are a few people who are going to come in to the sanctuary in just a moment, introduced individually and in pairs. As they come in, we're going to have some music playing, and they're going to get introduced with a couple sentences about each of them. And when the first person comes through the doors, I want you all to go bonkers cheering them on. And then repeat that for each person until all of them are up here at the front. Pretend you're at the Grammys and Taylor Swift steps out of the limo, or it's the team running out on the court or field just before the start of the game. Stand up, wave, cheer, whistle, clap... Let them know that they're important people to you, this church, and to God. Can you do this? So, if you're able, please stand up, let's begin the music, and let it rip with your applause, and cheer loudly for each of them as they come down the aisle....

(Once everyone's up front, ask them:)

1. What was it like to be cheered on like that?
2. How did it make you feel?

3. Would you want to be in the spotlight/feel supported like that regularly? (Responses were along the lines of: It was fun, felt good, encouraged, loved, etc.; But might not want to be in the spotlight like that all the time.)

Let's have one final round of applause as they return to their seats and back to classrooms where some of them are teaching children this morning. Now, I'm not trying to be irreverent with this wild and crazy illustration, but hopefully it conveys a point that will be made throughout this message. All of these people are people just like you and me. They aren't famous because they fly through the night on Christmas Eve, or because of musical or business accomplishments. They're every-day, hard-working, God-loving people whom we all know and love. And God loves them as much as anyone. His spotlight is on them. **And like them, God's spotlight continually shines on you.** Maybe that sounds intimidating a bit. Maybe it makes you want to run and hide. But when we do that, we're running from the one who loves us with an ever-lasting love.

When my oldest kids were younger, they used to run from me when I got home from work. I don't know why, except simply that it was a game for them. I'm kind and fun dad to them, I promise! At that time we were in Salt Lake City, and I had a very short commute. I'd walk out the back door of the church, across our carport, and in the back door of the house. That was it.

As I came in the back door, they wouldn't have much notice of my arrival and very little time to hide – no car coming down the road or pulling in the driveway; no living room window from which to see dad arriving. In fact, often times, I would hear them say as I opened the door, "Daddy's home! Quick, HIDE!" So, they'd quickly turn their backs to me, and put their faces down toward the ground. And then as I came in, they'd giggle and say, "We're hiding!" They hid from me, but they're in full view! Did they think I was blind? My spotlight is completely on them when I come home, and they somehow thought they could hide in plain sight... Is that what it feels like to you to know that God's attention is focused on you? Does it make you want to run and hide from him even though you're in plain sight to him?

Let me tell you something: God's spotlight isn't shining on you because he's

trying to keep track of you. He's not checking up on you to make sure you're folding your laundry, making your bed, and flossing your teeth. This isn't the spotlight of judgment or critique. That's the world's spotlight. That's the pedestal the world puts people up on. The world is just waiting for people to fall, for the door to open for criticism.

God's spotlight is on you because he loves you; because you've captured his attention and his heart. And we can't hide from him. **Psalm 17:8 says, "Guard me as the apple of your eye."** That's the psalmist's plea to God, to keep him as the apple of God's eye. Not to *make* him the apple of his eye. It's a given. He already is. You and I are the apples of God's eyes, he's always looking out for you, and he'll go to any length for you.

You know, a few minutes ago you all went pretty bonkers for these folks when they came in. You all went to great lengths to support them, cheering, clapping, and so forth (Glad you did, because if you hadn't, I was going to have to re-write this sermon on the fly!). It made them feel good and important. Maybe you've been in other situations like that, like when players come out onto the court or the field, or a musician steps on to the stage. If you think that's some crazy cheering, you should know that they've got nothing on God's love and adoration and cheering for you. And there's nothing you or I can do to earn any more of his love.

A woman once wrote to her ex-fiancée, with whom she had recently broken up (sounds like the basis for a good Taylor Swift song, right?): "Dearest Jimmy, no words could ever express the great unhappiness I've felt since breaking our engagement. Please say you'll take me back. No one could ever take your place in my heart, so please forgive me. I love you, I love you, I love you! Yours forever, Marie. P.S., Congratulations on winning the lottery."

You don't have to win the lottery to get God's love. You don't have to be perfect. You don't have to pray a certain way, worship in a certain style, or comb your hair just right. In fact, you can't do anything that will cause God to love you any more or any less. The Bible says, **"But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us" Romans 5:8.** Jesus Christ died for you so that all of your sins may be

wiped from the slate of your life, and God offers to you righteousness, blamelessness, and holiness in his eyes, before you've done a thing. So, we may shine the spotlight on celebrities, but God shines his light on us just as brightly. We may put celebrities up on metaphorical pedestals, but Jesus Christ got put up on an actual cross for you.

And next to Jesus, on either side, were two criminals, each hanging on crosses as well...**Which is more shocking: To find Jesus in the company of criminals, or to find the criminals in the company of Jesus?** Is it more unexpected to find Jesus in the company of sinners, or to find them in such good company? Is it shocking to you that Jesus Christ loves you...that he died for you? Does it surprise you that God cares for you, that God will go to any length to draw you to him, that he would welcome us into his presence? Or that he would come into our presence?

I want to share with you a true story about a man who loved BBQ ribs, as he tells it (not my story).¹ “I remember hearing about this particular restaurant that had amazing ribs, and a bunch of my friends and I drove fifty minutes to get there. The place was packed, and the food was great. It was “all you can eat rib night,” and rib bones were piling up as fast as the line to get in. Eating ribs is messy business. Barbecue sauce gets on your face, fingers, and clothes; dirty napkins pile up next to half-eaten bowls of baked beans and coleslaw. When our crew had eaten all we could eat, we paid our tab and waddled out to the car.

That's when I reached into my pocket for my keys and came up with nothing but lint. Starting to feel panicked, I looked through the window at the ignition. I was hoping that I had locked my keys in the car, because in the back of my mind a more disgusting possibility was taking shape. When I saw that the ignition was empty, I knew exactly where my keys were—the keys to my car, my house, and my office. Only seconds earlier, those precious keys had slid right off my tray and followed a half-eaten corn cob and several bones to the bottom of a trash can. I had thrown away my keys on ‘all you can eat rib night.’

There was only one thing for me to do. So, I dove in [to the trash]. I fished

through bones, beans, barbecue, corn, cake, coleslaw, and a host of saliva-soaked napkins. A shiny layer of trashcan slime had coated my arms before I finally grasped hold of those precious keys.”

That's not unlike what God has done for you and me. **God left a pristine, sinless heaven to search through the filth and rubbish and the garbage of this fallen world for something precious to him—and that's you.**

God cares about you. He is concerned about you. He is more concerned about you than he is with the slop in your life. You may think you're not worth being cared for; you may think that you're unlovable; you may think that you're not worthy of anyone's attention. But God thinks you are. He loved you before you were born, before you sinned, before you asked for forgiveness, before it all. He loves you so much, that God *acted* on behalf of you through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. He acted first, for you. **How are you and I going to react and respond to Jesus?**

This morning's passages from Matthew and from 2 Corinthians tells us how to react: By coming to Jesus, resting in him, and repenting from our sins. I know those last words aren't ones we hear a lot or that we really like to hear. It's like “repent” and “sin” are forgotten relics from a by-gone era of humanity. “Resting” in Jesus sounds great. The Matthew passage sounds good. Kick back, rest, relax, and coast right into eternity. But acknowledging that we have sin and repenting of it sounds so prudish and old-school. But we're no less sinful today than we were 2,000 years ago, and so the need for repentance is no less real.

Paul had written something to the Corinthian church in his previous letter – First Corinthians – which apparently had upset some people, made them sorrowful. And yet that sorrow led to their repentance. There was remorse. That's what Paul means by a “Godly sorrow:” their sorrow drew them closer to the Lord as they repented and asked for forgiveness. It was good that they had this sorrow, because it led them to Jesus. They grieved their sin, and then reacted to God's action of love and mercy through his son Jesus. So, when we repent (which simply means to turn way, turn in a new direction) from our sins and turn toward Jesus, we are putting our very lives in his. We are “in Christ.” We are reacting to his act of love as we let him into our lives and we

enter into him.

And do you know what happens when we come to Jesus to find rest for our weary souls and forgiveness for our sins? Jesus says that **“There is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents” (Luke 17:10)**. God rejoices when one person comes to him and repents. God cheers like crazy when even just one person turns away from their sins, and comes to Jesus; and this includes you and me.

And God doesn't just ask us to seek repentance and then give us nowhere to go. He doesn't expect us to turn away from sin and find our own way to him on our own. Rather, He provides for us the very means of remaining free from sin, of having our sins continually washed away, the very means of having a relationship with God, the very means for maintaining purity and holiness in his eyes: and that means is Jesus Christ. We repent; we turn *away* from our sins, and turn *toward* Jesus Christ, who gives us rest. “Come to me all you who are weary and carrying heavy burdens.” We find true rest in Jesus, when we are in relationship with him.

God's answer to your burdens: your struggles, your worries, your hurts, your sorrow, and the ultimate burden, sin...the answer to all of that is Jesus Christ. **Has God's answer become your answer?** Have we allowed him to be the answer for our questions about eternity, prayer, and purpose of this life? Not only does God answer those kinds of big questions, but he answers the smaller ones, too. The ones we face every day. Those are the ones that eat away at us, that drag us down, that make us depressed, that cripple our thinking, our acting, and our very living. The questions, the doubts, the fears the sins that creep into our lives, God has answers for them:

--You say: “It's impossible”

God says: All things are possible...

(Luke 18:27)

--You say: “Nobody really loves me”

God says: I love you...

(John 3:16; John 13:34)

- You say: "I can't go on"
God says: My grace is sufficient...
(II Corinthians 12:9; Psalm 91:15)
- You say: "I can't figure things out"
God says: I will direct your steps...
(Proverbs 3:5-6)
- You say: "I can't do it"
God says: You can do all things...
(Philippians 4:13)
- You say: "I'm not able"
God says: I am able...
(II Corinthians 9:8)
- You say: "It's not worth it"
God says: It will be worth it...
(Roman 8:28)
- You say: "I can't forgive myself"
God says: I forgive you...
(I John 1:9; Romans 8:1)
- You say: "I can't manage"
God says: I will supply all your needs...
(Philippians 4:19)
- You say: "I'm afraid"
God says: I have not given you a spirit of fear...
(II Timothy 1:7)
- You say: "I've never won the lottery"
God says: Sorry, you're on your own there

--You say: "I'm always worried and frustrated"

God says: Cast all your cares on me...

(I Peter 5:7)

--You say: "I'm grieving..."

God says: I weep with you

(John 11:35)

--You say: "I don't have enough faith"

God says: I've given *everyone* a measure of faith...

(Romans 12:3)

--You say: "I'm not smart enough"

God says: I give you wisdom...

(I Corinthians 1:30)

--You say: "I feel all alone"

God says: I will *never* leave you or forsake you...

(Hebrews 13:5)

--You say: "I don't know my future"

God says: I know the plans I have for you

(Jeremiah 29:11)

--You say: "I can't figure out life"

God Says: "I am the life"

(John 14:6)

--You say: "What is truth?"

God Says: I am the truth...

(John 14:6; 8:32)

--You say: "I can't find my way"

God Says: I am the way...Believe in me.

(John 14:6)

--You say: "I'm weary and burdened"

God says: Come to me and I will give you rest...

(Matthew 11:28-30)

Jesus Christ has come to you through all the garbage and sin in your life, and he stands ready to take all of that stuff upon himself. This morning, Jesus Christ stands before you and says to you, not that he *might* say this to you, he *is* saying to you, **"I love you. I gave my life for you. Repent of your sins, come to me, and find rest, forgiveness, peace, hope, and eternity. This is what I want for you, because I love you."**

There's not a person in this room or on the face of this planet who doesn't need to hear those words. And God's spotlight is on you and he cheers loudly for you as he showers you with his love. He's waiting with open arms for you and me to come to him. We need the love of God in our lives today, and we need Jesus for our eternal salvation. Jesus is the answer to it all. Jesus doesn't just give us the answer to everything we seek in our lives; He *is* everything we seek in our lives. We don't just live a certain way because of Jesus... We live Jesus. We don't just have a relationship with God because of Jesus... he is God. We don't just have the hope of eternal life because of his resurrection... Jesus is the resurrection and only Jesus Christ can take away all of our burdens and give us rest from here through eternity... **Do you need that kind of rest?**

As we close the sermon, I'd like to invite you to be drawn closer to Jesus. Maybe you've known him in your life for a long time, but still suffer from questions such as, "I'm not smart enough," or "I'm always worried and frustrated," or "nobody really loves me" or "I keep stumbling into the same darn sins..." Jesus invites you to draw near to Him and trust in him as the answer to your questions, as the one to find your identity in, as we talked about last week. Or maybe you have never let Jesus know that you want to experience his love and grace, that you want to be where he is, that you want him where you are. Maybe you've only found your identity in yourself and your accomplishments or other people... and not in the supreme identity of child of God through faith in Jesus, and your sin has kept you from him and from God your Heavenly Father. Embrace Godly sorrow for your sin, repent,

turn to Jesus in faith, and trust him for your forgiveness and to give you rest in this life and in the life to come. Invite Jesus further into your life. Let Jesus be the answer to your burdens and your fears. Let Jesus give you rest, because you are a child of God, and loved deeply by him. Let us pray...Amen.

¹ I've had this story in my files for years and years...and no idea where it came from, even after searching online in preparing this message.