

The World's Picture Of God

Introduction

In trying to determine how to begin the lesson today, I tried to think of what I could say to immediately grab your attention. Because honestly one of the hardest parts about fill-in preaching is realizing you are only up here once every several months but you want to try and say something or teach something to really help those listening so you want to do something to encourage them to listen. Perhaps a catchy illustration or story? Maybe a fancy Powerpoint background? Maybe a promise to only preach for 20 minutes?

But instead of those things, what I've chosen to do it to begin with a question around which we will base the remainder of our study. And here's the question:

"If the only picture of God the world ever saw was through our lives and actions, what would the picture look like?"

Now before we begin considering this question, let me say a couple of things. In all honesty, this lesson isn't meant to really be encouraging. It's also not intended to take a passage and break it down and find some hidden truth which we had never considered before. There are lessons to do that but this isn't one of them.

In reality, this lesson is one which, if we take it seriously, will actually hurt a little bit (or a lot). If we will actually take the few minutes this morning and really examine ourselves in the light of God's Word and think about the picture we are portraying to those around us, most of us will come away with things to work on.

[However, before we really begin to dig into the heart of the question, I think there is another question we need to address and that is...]

I. Do We Really Care About The Picture?

- a. And before you totally disregard this point by thinking "What a crazy question. Of course I care!" remember this lesson is all about really and truly examining ourselves and our lives. *Saying* we care and actually caring are 2 completely different things. We can say we care all day long but truly caring will lead us to change.
- b. There is a passage which came to mind while I was thinking about this point. It was the prayer of Jesus in **John 17:13-21**
 - i. Jesus is nearing the time of His betrayal and arrest and eventual crucifixion and He is spending time with His Father in prayer
 - ii. Notice what He prays for His followers:
 1. Kept from the evil one – vs. 15
 2. Sanctified – vs. 17
 3. To be one – vs. 21
 - iii. Why did He want these things?
 1. "...so that the world may believe that You sent Me"
- c. Jesus wanted His followers to be the picture to the world of the unity which existed between He and God. He wanted his followers to be what the world looked at and said "See that's what it's supposed to look like"
- d. And I believe the same thing applies today!
 - i. We wear the name of Christ! When people look at us, they should be able to say "See that is what it's supposed to look like!"
- e. Do we **really** care about the picture we are portraying for the world to see?

- i. If we do, our actions should show it
- ii. If we do, when we see the picture is blurry or smudged, we will make changes
 - 1. We aren't just going to say we are going to change...we are actually going to change

[So now we come to the crux of the matter. We can't really move forward with anything until address...]

II. What Do They See Today?

- a. When people look at the picture we are creating through of life and actions, what are they really seeing?
 - i. "I can't control what other people think"
 - 1. Don't use that excuse...yes we can!
 - 2. If we are truly doing what is right and are conducting ourselves in a manner which is above reproach we can most certainly influence the picture that other people see from us
 - ii. And remember, this isn't asking "what do we **hope** people are seeing?" or "what do we **think** they are seeing?"...the question is what are they actually seeing?
 - 1. Sometimes we try and make ourselves feel better by saying we aren't so bad. Remember, the intent of this question is to get us to honestly evaluate ourselves. And I can't answer this for you and you can't answer for me. I'm not with you all the time and you aren't with me all the time. We are only with ourselves all the time.
 - 2. So think about this last week. From how you acted, what you said, where you went, what you wore, your attitude, your work ethic, your decision making...what picture did you create?
- b. Let's take some pictures painted in God's Word and contrast it with our lives. Maybe we are displaying the same picture. If so, great! But maybe we aren't. And if so, then we know what we need to work on.
 - i. Speech/Use of the Tongue
 - 1. **James 3:1-10**
 - 2. **Matthew 12:33-37**
 - 3. So what about our speech? Clearly the Bible shows how important the spoken word is. And how dangerous and damaging evil things spoken are. So what about our speech?
 - a. If we were to ask the people around us everyday what would they say about our speech? Would they say they never hear us say anything bad? That we never say anything inappropriate? Never laugh when someone else says something off color? We don't participate in gossip? Or slander?
 - b. Or would they know us as the person who always has the latest dirt on a co-worker, a neighbor, or fellow church go-er? Would they say we are always good for a dirty joke? That we always have something off color to say about women in our office?
 - 4. The trick is none of us knows each other that way. Why? When we are here we are on our best behavior. But what about everywhere else?
 - 5. What picture does our speech portray to the world?
 - ii. Worldly Possessions
 - 1. Rich Young Ruler (**Matthew 19:16-24**); Rich Man (**Luke 12:16-21**)
 - 2. **Matthew 6:19-21**
 - iii. Modesty (What We Wear)
 - 1. It is shameful to show one's nakedness
 - a. Consider Adam and Eve – After they sinned, they made covering for themselves (**Genesis 3:7-10**). Why? Because they realized there was shame in exposing themselves to the world!
 - 2. It is shameful to draw attention to private parts of the body
 - a. The exposure of the private parts was often a form of judgment intended to shame the wicked – **Isaiah 3:16-17; 47:1-3**
 - 3. We must not provide opportunities for fleshly lusts
 - a. This is clearly addressed in scripture – **Romans 13:13-14**

- iv. Caring, Giving, and Loving to people around us
 - 1. The Good Samaritan – **Luke 10:33-37**
- v. Putting God First – **Matthew 6:33**
 - 1. When it comes to serving God, do we portray someone who will put Him first regardless of anything else? Or do we just say that and our actions show differently
 - a. Allowing work to come first
 - b. Allowing soccer practice to cause us to miss worship
 - c. Allowing school work and studying to come before studying God's Word
 - d. Allowing everything we want to do to come before being a servant to others
- c. This list could go on and on. The point being when we honestly stop and compare our life and the actions of it to the Word of God, is the picture we are portraying to the world the one God wants us to?
 - i. Maybe in some area it is. Then we should keep it up!
 - ii. But what about the areas where it isn't?

III. Understand What The Picture Should Be...And Clean Up The "Smudges"

- a. Going back to the second question I asked, I am going to make the assumption we all care about the picture we portray to the world.
- b. And I am going to make an assumption we all have areas where our life picture doesn't quite match to the picture in God's Word
- c. So what do we do about it?
- d. We begin by understanding what God's picture should look like
 - i. There is only one way to do this and that is spending time in God's Word
 - ii. Allowing the Word Of God to be light and lamp of our life (**Psalm 119:105**)
 - iii. Understanding what God tells us about how to use our tongue, about what we should desire most, about what we should wear, how we should care and love and give of ourselves. About how to put Him first
- e. If we truly want to make sure we are portraying an accurate picture of God to the world around us then we must spend time with God's Word everyday
 - i. <http://giveattentiontoreading.com/>
- f. And then as we begin to understand His picture and what our life should look like, we need to clean off the smudges from our picture so the world clearly sees God in us
- g. What does this mean?
 - i. It may mean we change who we are...just like Saul of Tarsus did!
 - ii. Practically speaking...
 - 1. We change our focus in life
 - 2. We change our companions
 - 3. We change our wardrobe
 - 4. We change our tongue
 - 5. We change our activities from inward focus to outward focus
 - 6. We change our priorities
 - iii. We change any and everything we have to in order to make the picture of our life match to the picture of God's Word!
- h. And this cleaning of the smudges will have to keep occurring. Because unfortunately there are going to be times when we mess up and allow ourselves to become tainted again and the picture gets out of focus
 - i. But if we are daily in His word...and we are taking time regularly to honestly examine ourselves in the light of His Word then we will catch the smudges early before they really have time to ruin the whole picture

Conclusion

What does the picture of your life show to the world around you? Is it a picture you are proud of? Is it a picture you would be comfortable showing to the people sitting around you right now? Is it a picture you are comfortable showing to God? Because He's seeing it whether anyone else is or not.

Is there something we can do for you today? Can we help each other re-focus ourselves on the life God wants us to live? If we can help you today by praying with you for God to forgive your past transgressions, then let's do that now. Or if we can baptize you today, into the body of Christ, giving you a new life and a fresh start so your picture is clean of any past failures, then let's do that now.