

Blandford Forum - Sunday 25 February 2007 - 10.30

Rev Martin Court

"Worship Is ... Discipline"

Luke 10:25-37

A young boy had just gotten his provisional driving license. He asked his father, who was a minister, if they could discuss the use of the car. His father took him to his study and said to him, "I'll make a deal with you. You bring your grades up, study your Bible a little and get your hair cut and we'll talk about it." After about a month the boy came back and again asked his father if they could discuss use of the car. They again went to the father's study where his father said, "Son, I've been real proud of you. You have brought your grades up, you've studied your Bible diligently, but you didn't get your hair cut!"

The young man waited a moment and replied, "You know Dad, I've been thinking about that. You know, Samson had long hair, Moses had long hair, Noah had long hair, and even Jesus had long hair...." To which his father replied, "Yes, and they walked every where they went!"

As our sermon series marches on through the discovery of what worship is so we have come to another great ethos of the bible. Discipline.

The dictionary describes discipline as strict rules of behaviour, to behave and work in a controlled manner, academic study and to improve our behaviour by learning.

It also means to tell off but I want to pick up on the way we behave before God.

We live in a post-modern world in which emphasis is placed on humanity to the detriment of Yahweh, we celebrate ourselves but can forget to celebrate God.

Jim Collins, in his secular book 'Good to great' says 'Few people attain great lives in large part because it is just so easy to settle for a good life.'

Post-modernity and the failure to strive for greatness because we're content with simply being good. And that reflects onto our celebration of God.

At 17 I passed my driving test and I drove.

Nine years later I eventually got into the Police Force, and there in Christchurch station yard was a bright shiny Panda car with my name on it.

Off you go, you would think. Off you go I thought. No chance said the Police. Before I could get behind the wheel I had to go on a driving course.

But I've got my licence I protested. Not good enough. Two weeks of training. Two weeks of taking those basic skills that I had learned in order to pass my test and improving them before I could even drive a Panda.

And so it was throughout my time in the force. Umpteen driving courses, all teaching me more about driving. All making me better, because if I was to do the jobs I was asked to do well, I had to mature and I had to grow as a driver.

And that's in the secular world.

I was talking to someone about church music. He said, 'Do you know Martin, a young band wanting to make it big practice every hour they can in order to get better so they can earn more. '

They dedicate themselves, discipline themselves, just so they can line their own pocket. In church we're playing for God. How much more should we dedicate ourselves to practice, to being the best we can be for God.

And I'm not picking on music. I mean, what music do you play for God, what part do you play?

Because it's not just in music that the church, and I don't mean just this church but 'The church' has lost the ethos of excellence. It's not just in music that we come with just a driving licence and think it's good enough, it's throughout church.

In giving out coffee or leading a bible study or praying or preaching or cutting the church hedge.

We come with a driving licence and say 'I can do that' but the fact is that that is not good enough for God. Strong words, and I know some will object, but hear me out.

I've been playing guitar for about two years now and I can play 'Come now is the time to worship' or 'Holy Holy' or 'O Perfect Love', but not in here because in here I strive for excellence for God and there are better guitar players than me and so my best is outweighed by the best of others. They must play and I must sacrifice my love of music so that as a body in God's Holy temple we offer our very best to the Almighty.

But is that just Martin's ethos? Is that just Martin calling for growth and striving and discipline and commitment?

The Good Samaritan. We know it inside out.

A priest and a Levite. And make no mistake, they had their driving licence. They had done well at theological college or Levitological college or whatever it was.

And so Jesus puts them into a pastoral situation that they should have been able to deal with in a flash. Man half dead lying at the side of the road.

But they couldn't. They couldn't deal with it. They walked on by. They had the licence, but they had failed to keep growing and maturing and learning about how to apply that licence to the world around them. They weren't doing their best.

The prophecies of Amos had been written down 300 years before, and yet Jesus finds himself retelling the prophecy in story form because the church had missed the point of Amos and they had forgotten who God was. And God wasn't happy to be forgotten,

Amos 5 21-24

*I hate, I despise your religious feasts, I cannot stand your assemblies.
Even though you bring me burnt offerings and
Grain offerings I will not accept them. Though you bring choice*

*Fellowship offerings I will have no regard for them.
Away with the noise of your songs. I will not listen to the music of your harps.*

Israel was going to church. They had the driving licence but they were failing to build on it. They thought to worship together was enough but God wanted them to grow and mature and love and live with justice but they never trod on the ladder of learning or striving that would have given them the success to be a light to the nations.

They lacked discipline and had ceased to strive for God. And what did God say to them in that church? Close it down.

Not 'Thanks, you're trying hard and it's great you still worship me but have you thought about

Close it down. There's no reaching for gold any more. And throughout the bible God is insistent on that.

John 15, every branch that bears no fruit gets cut off.

Does a new shoot bare fruit? No. It's a driving licence. It's the start of life but it needs to grow and mature, to get stronger and bigger and better. And then the fruit comes, then the wheat sheaves appear.

A young boy and his doting grandmother were walking along the sea shore when a huge wave appeared out of nowhere, sweeping the child out to sea. The horrified woman fell to her knees, raised her eyes to the heavens and begged the Lord to return

her beloved grandson. And, another wave reared up and deposited the stunned child

on the sand. The grandmother looked the boy over carefully. He was fine.

But still she stared up angrily toward the heavens. "When we came," she snapped indignantly, "he had a hat!"

We expect the best from God. In prayer we list off our wants and pleas and every one of them demands the best from God.

In writing to the Corinthians Paul says 'Try to excel in gifts that build up the church.' Excel. Learn, grow, improve. Excel, surpass, be outstanding.

And in there is that word, 'Try'. And we must keep proportion as we strive to offer God our best, but that doesn't mean don't try.

Geoffrey Fisher, former Archbishop of Canterbury said this,

When you aim for perfection you discover it is a moving target.

But how does he know that? How does Yo Geoff know that perfection is a moving target unless he has found necessity to aim for it in his Christian life.

And it's the story of the talents. Where is it? What have you done with it? I buried just as you gave it to me. I haven't grown it at all. And you remember that that wasn't good enough in God's eyes.

But I'm not simply asking us, you and me, to work harder. I'm asking us to think about why we do what we do, and then to ascribe some value to it.

Israel had forgotten to ask 'Why?' and therefore they'd lost sight of the reason.

Gen 1.1

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now, the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.

God is awesome. God created everything that you and I look on and more.

*Each little flower that opens,
Each little bird that sings,
He made their glowing colours,
He made their tiny wings.*

But then more than that. Mark 1 9 and Christ's baptism and the Spirit came upon him and God said, 'You are my Son whom I love, with you I am well pleased.'

God, clothed as man, came to earth for the sake of all that he'd created.

And then more still as we read Revelation chapter 21 and see God's promise of a future made for us. No more death or crying or pain for the old order of things will be swept away for God's perfection that awaits us.

And we begin to see a God who was and is and is to come, and just as we see that we see the stuff that blows us away.

For you created my inmost being,
You knit me together in my mothers womb.

And we find that the God of all that, the God of the universe focuses through the magnitude of all that he was and is and will be right down into the hearts of you and me. Such is his doting on us that our names are tattooed on his hand.

Wow. The Father, Son and Holy Spirit care for, love, are so interested in Martin and Osbert and and that they count the hairs on our heads.

And Israel had forgotten that. They had forgotten who it was they served.

Ever read God's response to Israel through his prophet Malachi? You only have to read the first chapter to see what God thinks of second best.

Israel failed to see or just plain forgotten that God deserves the very best and so they brought lame and blind animals for sacrifice.

Hey, they're just gonna get burned. What does it matter?

Ever tried wrapping the wife's Christmas present in yesterdays news paper? Yeah, but she's only going to throw it away.

Second best - not good enough for your wife, certainly not good enough for your God.

As Bill Hybels says, 'How we do church matters in heaven.'

You know the verse that shapes my entire life before God? 2 Samuel 24.24.

God has asked David to build him an altar on the threshing floor of Arauna the Jebusite. So David goes and agrees the fair price for the threshing floor but when Arauna enquires as to the use for his threshing floor and learns that it is to be an altar to God he says to David, 'Have it for free, take it.'

But God is worth so much more to David than free or even cheap,

No, I insist on paying for it. I will not sacrifice burnt offerings to the Lord my God that have cost me nothing.

When God spoke to his people through Malachi, a people content with second best he said,
Oh that one of you would shut the temple
Doors so that you would not light useless
Fires on my altar.

For I am a great king, says the Lord Almighty, and
My name is to be feared amongst the nations.

What of you and I? Are we the priest or the Levite, content with a driving licence but forgetting who we serve? Failing to strive to be the best we can be for God? Failing to offer our best to God. Second best is good enough?

What did the Samaritan do? He went the extra mile. He put himself out and paid the price. He didn't settle for second best. He didn't walk by on the other side. He didn't even bandage the man and leave him there. He gave his all because only the best was good enough. And Jesus made sure he was secular.

We're church, and as Bill Hybels says, the way we do church matters in heaven.

Amen.