



Growing in Grace – The end of Blah, Blah, Blah

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- How important is it in many endeavors to be sure that you have identified, and then learned to stay focused, on the target?...
- for example, if you're playing baseball and you're up to bat...there are so many things to think about...
 - the people in the stands...
 - the other players on the field who may be saying all kinds of things to distract you...
 - the fear in your own heart of how bad it is going to feel when the ball hits you in the noggin...
 - there are all kinds of things to focus on...
 - which is why coaches tell players at even the earliest age...just...keep your eye on the ball...don't take your eye off the ball...
 - (that's why I was never a very good hitter – because I was so afraid of being beamed by the ball again that I generally had my eyes closed when I was batting...)
 - you have to identify the target...you have to learn to stay focused on it in a very precise, disciplined way...
- we saw in the recent NCAA tourney that often basketball games down to who does the best job at the foul line...
 - which is why student sections often set themselves up right behind the baskets...
 - and when an opposing player is shooting a foul shot...the place goes crazy...
 - people have banners and streamers – they're waving all sorts of things around to try to distract the shooter...
 - at the same time they are screaming and yelling and chanting...
 - but you see a disciplined player step up to the line and he's looking at one thing – the basket...and he or she drains that foul shot like they're the only person in the gym...
- to be able to identify and stay focused on the target is an incredibly important skill...
- some companies have even turned that skill into an important part of their business plan...
 - think of the patriot missile
 - this is a picture of the Patriot Surface to Air Missile System...
 - many countries have to be concerned with enemies shooting missiles at their key cities or strategic targets...
 - and the Raytheon Company designed a system to intercept those enemy missiles and shoot them down...
 - patriot missile
 - you may remember hearing about these during the Gulf War when they were used to intercept Scud missiles shot by the Iraqis'...
 - like with most things, there is disagreement about how successful the Patriots were and continue to be...

- but the fact that engineers could build a system that could even potentially, not only hit a far-away target, but hit one that itself is moving at a high rate of speed is amazing...
- that's called, being able to identify, and stay focused, on a target...
- now let me ask you this – what does any of this have to do with friendships?...
- and the answer is this – many of us really struggle with communicating in a way that really focuses on the problem or that generates lasting solutions...
- It sounds a lot like blah, blah, blah...
 - either because we're ignoring the problem and just talking about superficial things that really don't matter...
 - or we're talking about the problem in the way that really doesn't get at the core issues...that just goes round and round the mulberry bush...
 - so it can be blah, blah, blah because it's superficial...or blah, blah, blah because it's misdirected...
 - either way, the net effect is something other than the cultivation of authentic friendships...
 - let's see what we can do to address that...
- let me invite you to open your Bible to two passages this morning...John chapter 12 and Ephesians chapter 4..
- we have a great opportunity today to talk about the Sunday traditionally referred to as Palm Sunday...
 - we'll talk more about why that is in a minute...
 - but we're also want to see what Scripture tells about the art of making and keeping authentic friendships...
 - our assignment this morning is to talk about communication...The End of Blah, Blah, Blah... - the end of superficial or misdirected communication that fails to identify and focus on the central issues...
 - that's exactly what was happening on Palm Sunday...there are a series of conversations that illustrate this point in several different ways...
 - and the solution to this problem in communication is presented in very clear terms in our second passage – let's dig in first in John 12...
- read John 12:1-2...
 - we need to stop there for a just a moment and point out an important historical detail...
 - I hope you took me up on my challenge last week to read through the final chapters of each of the four gospels, or maybe even to do so with a harmony of the gospels, a book that organizes all that Scripture tells us about the last days of Christ in a chronological fashion...
 - but if you did that...you may have noted a crucial idea from the end of the last chapter...
 - John 11:57 - But the chief priests and Pharisees had given orders that if anyone found out where Jesus was, he should report it so that they might arrest him.
 - here's one of the many examples in Scripture of a person obeying God rather than men...
 - generally we are to submit to human authority but not when following that authority in itself would be sinful...
 - so Lazarus and his sisters Mary and Martha don't turn Jesus in...they hold a dinner in His honor...and we don't everybody who is here at the beginning – it would certainly be Christ and the twelve disciples, and Mary, Martha, and Lazarus...and also a man named Simon the Leper...
 - we know that because the parallel passages in both Matthew and Mark explain that piece...

- Matthew 26:6 - While Jesus was in Bethany in the home of a man known as Simon the Leper,
- we don't know much about this man, but we can infer that Jesus had at one point healed him of his leprosy...because otherwise Jewish individuals would not be in his home other because he would be contagious or at least would make them ceremonially unclean for celebrating the Passover six days from now...
- let's keep reading...
- read John 12:3-8
 - Jesus wasn't being dismissive of ministry to the poor – He was simply making the important point that perhaps Mary understood the central issue here...that Jesus was about to die for her sins as the perfect Lamb of God and the Messiah who had been clearly prophesied throughout the Old Testament Scriptures...
 - Judas clearly didn't get that...his focus was somewhere else...
 - we also know from other places in Scripture that the disciples weren't focused on that either...
 - in some ways Martha got it – clearly Mary did...they were like Patriot missiles...Jesus is about to solve my sin problem and there's nothing more worthy of my focus than that...
- read John 12:9-19...
 - now, we'll say more about this later...but we just saw several different conversations...
 - from Judas, from the religious leaders, from the crowd who came to see the show...
 - and the contrast is between all of them, and these two women who were focused on honoring the one who was about to die for their sin...
- remember, that the Gospel of John would end with these words...John 20:30-31 - Therefore many other signs Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name.
- that explains the significance of a statement that Christ made earlier...John 8:24 - Therefore I said to you that you will die in your sins; for unless you believe that I am *He*, you will die in your sins.
- Mary and Martha got that – I understand and acknowledge the problem...how my sin has separated me from God and the possibility of “dying in my sins”...and I also worship and adore the solution...Jesus dying in my place that I might be forgiven and that believing, I might have life in His name...
- now, let's see that same kind of focus in Ephesians 4...what does authentic communication look like...what does it sound like?...blah, blah, blah?...or something specific, guided, having identified the problem and focused on the solution?...
- read Ephesians 4:17-32
- now, with the time we have remaining, let's put these passages together and look for 4 characteristics of authentic communication.

I. Authentic Communication is Truthful.

Ephesians 4:25 - Therefore, laying aside falsehood, SPEAK TRUTH EACH ONE *of you* WITH HIS NEIGHBOR, for we are members of one another.

A. Remember that God's truth is a very precise and specific.

- some men and women struggle greatly when they are trying to communicate because they live in a world that is very fuzzy and general...
- like a Patriot missile that has no tracking device...it doesn't have the ability to pinpoint the real problem...
- what's lacking there is truth...which in God's Word is always precise, and exact, and specific...
- Palm Sunday is a great day to make that point...here's why...
- it's because this event is an exact fulfillment of a prophecy made several hundred years before through a man named Daniel...
- he spoke about weeks, in this case groupings of years...
 - Daniel 9:24-26 - Seventy weeks have been decreed for your people and your holy city, to finish the transgression, to make an end of sin, to make atonement for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy and to anoint the most holy *place*. So you are to know and discern *that* from the issuing of a decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until Messiah the Prince *there will be* seven weeks and sixty-two weeks; it will be built again, with plaza and moat, even in times of distress. Then after the sixty-two weeks the Messiah will be cut off and have nothing...
 - we know that the decree allowing the deported Jews to go back and begin rebuilding Jerusalem was issued in 445 BC.
 - and 483 years (or, 69 "sevens" in this particular prophecy), but 483 years in the Jewish calendar brings us to this very year where it is time for the most pivotal event in all of human history to occur...
 - the death of the Messiah for the sins of man...and His subsequent resurrection...
 - just like other places in God's Word explained...
 - Isaiah 53:6-8 - All of us like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; but the LORD has caused the iniquity of us all to fall on Him. He was oppressed and He was afflicted, Yet He did not open His mouth; like a lamb that is led to slaughter, and like a sheep that is silent before its shearers, so He did not open His mouth. By oppression and judgment He was taken away; and as for His generation, who considered that He was cut off out of the land of the living for the transgression of my people, to whom the stroke *was due*?
 - God's truth was crystal clear on the absolute necessity of the substitutionary death of Christ...
- the OT also prophesied the resurrection, in places like...Psalm 16:8-10 - I have set the LORD continually before me; because He is at my right hand, I will not be shaken. Therefore my heart is glad and my glory rejoices; My flesh also will dwell securely. For You will not abandon my soul to Sheol; nor will You allow Your Holy One to undergo decay.
- and we know from Peter's great sermon in Acts chapter 2 that this is a Messianic Psalm and the reference is to the resurrection of Christ...
- God's Word is precise and specific...something had to be done about the problem of sin...and it would require the Messiah's death, burial and resurrection in order to completely solve that problem once and for all...
 - and if someone would say – but PV, those are OT passages---they were written long ago...can we really expect the disciples to have connected those dots?...
 - Jesus was very careful to clearly explain that kind of truth in His teaching ministry...
- Matthew 16:21-22 - From that time Jesus began to show His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be

killed, and be raised up on the third day. Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, saying, "God forbid *it*, Lord! This shall never happen to You."

- The Lord is clearly explaining the truth and even people who have walked with Him for nearly three years want no part of it...

B. Some men and women do not value truth in the way they communicate.

- the passage in John went on to explain that a whole crowd of people came to Simon the Leper's house...that group eventually melded into another group coming out of Jerusalem and when Jesus mounted a donkey and entered the city, they grabbed their palm branches and began shouting Hosanna, blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord..."
- that's why we call this Palm Sunday...
 - and back in the OT, palm branches were associated with The Feast of Tabernacles, not Passover...
 - but in the intertestamental period, there are examples of military and political leaders having a great victory and then being welcomed back into the city with people waving palm branches...
 - and that very well may be what was going on in the minds of many...
 - Jesus is coming as our military leader to deliver us from Roman oppression...
 - and that's the picture you keep seeing here – men and women being unwilling or unable to focus in on the central truth...
 - so why did a bunch of people come to Simon the Leper's house?...not to honor the Messiah who was about to die for their sin...but to be intrigued by Lazarus as thrill seekers and casual observers...
 - now they are coming out with their palm branches and on the one hand they are right...they are worshipping the promised Messiah...but their allegiance is short lived because they want a Messiah who gives them the what they want (political freedom from their external enemies), not what they need (salvation from their internal sin and its resultant behavior)...
- and there's a lot to this story that we just don't have time to cover...but it's interesting that at the very end...Jesus says...
- Luke 19:41-42 - When He approached *Jerusalem*, He saw the city and wept over it, saying, "If you had known in this day, even you, the things which make for peace!..."
- that was the net effect of Palm Sunday – a lot of blah, blah, blah...
 - a lot of talk, a lot of emotion...but completely missing the central truth of what was occurring...
- now let's bring that around to friendships and communication...
- what are the central truths when you and a friend have hit a rough spot?...are having some sort of disagreement...
 - how did I sin against you (if I did)?...
 - how did you sin against me (if you did)?...
 - how can we avoid sin in how we respond now (even if this started as a simple disagreement)?...
 - and how can we go to the Savior for strength to avoid additional sin as we work this out?...

- but some people would rather have a superficial relationship with another person than sitting down and telling that person the truth...even if it hurts one or both parties to do...
- or some people would rather cut their friend off, or have all sorts of drama, than letting their friend tell them the truth...how would you analyze yourself on those points?...

II. Authentic Communication is Timely.

Ephesians 4:26-27 - BE ANGRY, AND *yet* DO NOT SIN; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and do not give the devil an opportunity.

A. Deal with the truth now, while you have the opportunity to.

- if your friend has done something that is sinful, hurtful, and wrong...that may make you angry...
- and there is no question about the fact that you can be angry without sinning...
- Scripture tells us that...Psalm 7:11 - God is angry with the wicked every day.
- but the key issue is – what are you going to do with that anger?...
 - and God wants you to use it...first to focus on any way you might have sinned – to get the log out of your own eye first...
 - and then to honestly talk to that other person about how you believed they sinned...
 - but not to let the sun go down on your wrath...

1. So that your anger doesn't ferment into bitterness.

Hebrews 12:14-15 - Pursue peace with all *people*, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord: looking carefully lest anyone fall short of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled;

2. Because there will be more problems tomorrow.

- Matthew 6:34 - So do not worry about tomorrow; for tomorrow will care for itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.
- and the issue here is timing...when you think about Palm Sunday...everyone in that situation had a decision to make at a point in time that either took them closer to the truth, or further away from it...
- here's Judas – who has an opportunity to be impacted by what Mary has just done...and he's talking all right...talking a lot...
- John 12:4-6 - But Judas Iscariot, one of His disciples, who was intending to betray Him, said, "Why was this perfume not sold for three hundred denarii and given to poor *people*?"
 - and someone standing by might say – wow, he's communicating...
 - or, what a great point about financial stewardship...
- see, just because someone is talking doesn't mean they are dealing with the truth...and John made that clear in the next verse...
- John 12:6 Now he said this, not because he was concerned about the poor, but because he was a thief, and as he had the money box, he used to pilfer what was put into it.
- he had an opportunity to deal with the truth...and he missed it, and in his case, his time was running out faster than he would have ever believed...

- 2 very important questions at this point...one, have you dealt with the truth of your sin by admitting its existence, and then trusting what Christ did on the cross as your only hope of forgiveness?...
- do you know one of the greatest examples of blah, blah, blah in a town like ours?...
 - it's the issue of how a person gets to heaven...
 - and so much of what is said about that issue, and what is thought about that issue...is simply untrue...
 - because let's face it – the truth is uncomfortable...
 - so many people in our community, and you may be one of them, believe they will earn heaven by their good works (heavenly scales....)
- here's the truth...Romans 3:23 - for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,
- any discussion of heaven, or eternal life that does not specifically and precisely focus on the reality of sin and the utter hopelessness of human beings to do anything about it on our own is something other than the gospel of truth...
- and all kinds of people come to church to see the show, or join the club, or make new business contacts...or whatever...
 - without ever facing the truth...the reality of their sin...and repenting and trusting Christ while they have the opportunity to do so...
- 2nd question – Do you know there is something you should discuss with your friend or loved one but you keep putting it off and putting it off?...
 - what do you think God is saying to you through His Word today?
- the issue of timing is important for a lot of reasons, but did you see the one specifically mentioned in this verse?...

B. So you don't give our adversary a foothold.

- Ephesians 4:27 - ...and do not give the devil an opportunity.
- isn't that exactly what happened to Judas because of his unwillingness to face the truth that was being beautifully portrayed right before his eyes?...
- relationships are hard enough without having to deal with the fact you have given the devil...the father of lies...a foothold because you didn't deal with the truth when you had the opportunity to do so...

III. Authentic Communication is Constructive

- Ephesians 4:29 - Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a *word* as is good for edification according to the need *of the moment*, so that it will give grace to those who hear.
- A. Truthful communication between friends does not have to be destructive.**
 - Proverbs 27:6 - Faithful are the wounds of a friend, but deceitful are the kisses of an enemy.
 - Romans 15:14 - And concerning you, my brethren, I myself also am convinced that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge and able also to admonish one another.
- B. Be sure your goal is to build the other person up, addressing their current needs, with the goal of ministering grace to them.**

- we're certainly not trying to create a communicative Frankenstein here...
- I was told me to go out and tell my friends the truth – look out world, because I'm going to give you a piece of mind...I've been waiting get this off my chest for a long time...
- cf. watching Pastor Goode write out conversations to be sure he was choosing words carefully...

IV. Authentic Communication is Christ-like.

A. Don't speak in a way that adds more sin to the equation.

Ephesians 4:31- Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice.

- If you really have a laser guided missile at finding the truth...you certainly wouldn't want to do anything that would make the problem any bigger than it already is....

B. Let your words address the sin of the situation similar to the way Christ's sacrifice addressed yours.

- Ephesians 4:32 Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.

- there are a lot of different people in this story...
 - and the key question is...who are you most like?...in your relationship to facing the central truth of the existence of sin?...
1. Are you like Judas?...you're talking...but it's not authentic communication – it's blah, blah, blah...because you have a hidden agenda that you're ashamed to put on the table
 2. Are you like the religious leaders?...you won't face your need of a Savior for your sin because it would cause you to reject your system of self-righteousness and you're unwilling to admit that you need a Savior?...
 3. Are you like the crowd?...sure, I'll wave a palm branch....as long as Jesus gives me everything I want from Him...I'll celebrate Him as long as He serves me but there's certainly nothing sinful or wrong about the trajectory I'm on...
 4. or are you like Mary?...who gets it...
 - the central truth is heinous existence of sin...in all of us, down to the core, our very natures...
 - and the amazing truth that Christ was willing to die in the place of our sin so that the truth could make us free...
- and that's why today – your communication with your friends isn't blah, blah, blah...
 - it's truth...that is spoken in a way that is timely, and constructive, and Christ-like...