

Part 25: The Danger of Not Seeing Our Needs

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One of my wife and I's favorite ways to unwind after a long day is to watch Netflix. And when I say "watch Netflix," I mean scroll through Netflix until it's time to go to bed. I am famous for never selecting a show or movie because I'm always worried that we are not going to pick the best one and we will be disappointed.

We live in a world which offers so many choices to us that we actually can get what we want almost all of the time. Facebook lets us choose our friends, Twitter our news sources, Spotify our music, Blue Apron our meals, Netflix our TV shows, Amazon our personal recommendations, and Burger King where you can always have it your way.

But are all these options really good for us? Does it make us happier and more content? In other words in a world where all we get is what we want, why is it we aren't satisfied? Barry Schwartz is a psychologist and author who wrote a book called, "The Paradox of Choice."

He says that an unintended side effect of the freedom of choice is a fear to make a choice. We are paralyzed in fear of choosing the wrong thing. He cites a study done by one of his colleagues which looked at investment plans offered to employees.

I remember when my wife received info from her employer which outlined the options we had for a matching retirement fund. There were all sorts of funds we could choose from but the benefit of it was that if you put in "X" amount of dollars the employer would match up to X percent. The study Schwartz mentions looks at these opportunities and noticed this: **And what she found is that for every 10 mutual funds the employer offered, rate of participation went down two percent. You offer 50 funds -- 10 percent fewer employees participate than if you only offer five. Why? Because with 50 funds to choose from, it's so hard to decide which fund to choose, that you'll just put it off until tomorrow. And then tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow, and of course tomorrow never comes.**

He goes on to say that due to these abounding choices and the fear of not selecting the right fund, employees are passing up as much as \$5,000 a year in matching funds from their employer.

Whether it's on Netflix, your favorite restaurant, or deciding when to buy your plane tickets, you've probably experienced the weight this adds to your decision making. When we know we ourselves are the deciding factor to judge what is best, we are often too paralyzed to make a decision because we don't want to regret it.

So what we do is we double down on our wants. We become picker, more exclusive and more educated. And what we end up doing is establishing ourselves as the final authority to not only decide what we want, but to decide what it is we need.

We have been working our way through the book of Matthew, and what we are going to see today is that those same dilemmas were present two thousand years ago. Without a clear understanding of what is best, our hearts often settle for a God of our own choosing.

Last week Jesus gave us examples of two men who examined the beauty of the Kingdom of Heaven and were compelled to give everything for it. Today Matthew is going to give us two stories of people who examined the King of the Kingdom and decided he was not what they needed. At this point in Matthew's book, the crowds which once followed Jesus are now being divided. And that point of division is each person wrestling with the question of who Jesus really is.

What we are going to see today is people examining the person and the message of Jesus and coming to the conclusion of: "That's not what I want. I'll wait."

In these stories of rejection what we are going to see is this: **Jesus should be what we want precisely because he is what we need.** You see sometimes, when there is only one option we feel the need to settle for that option even if it is not perfect. But when it comes to issues of salvation, Jesus is the only option, but he is also the perfect option. For it is only Jesus who can save us from our sins and give us the treasure of being restored to God.

So what I want to do right now is read both stories in their full context and then we are going to slow walk through each of these. If you have your Bibles open them with me to **Matthew 13:53-4:12.**

There is a lot of stuff going on in these two stories but when we begin to carve away at them here is what we see: In Nazareth the Jews wanted the teachings and theology of the Old Testament, but not the Messiah of the Old Testament. And in Herod's palace we see the Jews and Herod want the comfort of having the prophet of God without having to obey the prophecy of God.

In other words we see people pass on Jesus because he doesn't satisfy the demands of their pride or their pleasure. Both of these reveal some deep universal truths about our hearts and how we consider the person and work of Jesus Christ. This is true for believers and non-believers: Jesus is either your treasure, or he is a threat to your treasure. Your interaction and response to him is downstream of that thought.

Looking at the first story this morning we see this: **Our hearts want personal performance over the person of Christ.**

Let me give you an example of this. How many of you have been on a sports team, in a band, or part of a group presentation at work where someone else quickly out produces you and gathers the praise of your peers and superiors?

The first thing we do when that happens is we begin to feel threatened by their performance and then we attempt to look for flaws in that person. In the workplace we say, "Sure, Dave is getting all the credit for it, but he's really just stealing the ideas from someone else." In parenting we look at someone else's well behaved kids and we say, "If I had that financial security and could stay home with my kids all day they would be that well behaved too!"

In sports people say Michael Jordan is the greatest of all time, but then the LeBron fans say, "Michael Jordan played against weaker opponents than LeBron, if LeBron played when MJ played he would have looked even better."

We love to examine the work of someone else and quickly say, "He's really no better than me." Somehow we all have this odd ability to look at the performance of someone else and warp that into an affirmation of our own pride.

That's exactly what happened in Jesus' hometown of Nazareth.

Now Nazareth was not the most prestigious of towns. In fact note the response of the disciple Nathanael in **John 1:43-46**. So Nazareth was not well thought of in the entire region of Galilee, so you can imagine the sensitivity the average Nazarene might feel towards Jesus, the guy who went on to make it big.

Look at how the scene unfolds: **Matthew 13:53-54a**. Jesus comes in, and his town is astonished at his teaching. They are amazed at the wisdom he received. But now they had a choice to make. They were presented with Jesus in the flesh, they were amazed at him, but did they want him?

Let's continue: **Matthew 13:54b-57a**. My wife and I are listening to a podcast about a murder in a small town. The journalist interviewed some peers of the two guys suspected of murder, and they all recollect how ordinary they were. "I remember hanging out with him on the weekends." "He used to talk kindly to my grandma." "I would have never thought he was capable of this."

Jesus' hometown is now using that same logic but their conclusion is far more costly. Because as Jesus taught in the synagogues, the message he taught was a message about his own identity. He proclaimed the Kingdom of God, but he also made it clear that he was the King of this Kingdom. Look with me at **Luke 4:16-21**.

It is because Jesus claimed that he was the hope of the Jews, the very anointed savior of God, that Matthew says they took offense at him. That word "offense" in verse 57 does not mean a simply offense of pride, but rather it communicates being so repelled by someone that you would fall into sin.

What is this sin: unbelief. They did not believe him because they couldn't believe he was any different than them. You see at the heart of what happened in Nazareth was the Jews looking at Jesus and saying, "He's one of us. I knew him, I know his mom, I work with his brother, he is no different than us. He doesn't offer anything to us that we cannot provide in ourselves."

They wanted all the theology, forms of worship, and acceptance that came from being good Jews who went to synagogue, but they didn't want Jesus. They looked at their options and said: "We don't need you. You're not what we want, we'll wait."

They loved their scriptures, but they didn't love Jesus. They failed to realize that the law they held so dear was always meant to give way to Jesus. **Galatians 2:16**.

The distinction here is subtle: they loved what appeared to be biblical things, but they missed the whole point of it. This can just as subtly rule our interaction with Jesus today. Many of us are offended by Jesus and we don't even know it.

We don't feel offended, but that's because our wants have created a Jesus who is nothing more than an extension of our own choosing. He exists to bolster our self-righteousness instead of making us reliant on his righteousness.

Jesus loves me just the way I am. Yes, Jesus loves you, but Romans 8:29 says he wants you to be more like him. Of course Jesus loves me, I've always believed in him and I've always wanted to please him. Yes he loves you, but he loved you when Romans 1:30 says you were a God-hater. Jesus loves me because I gave my life to him when I was in college. Yes, you gave your life to him, but Jesus says in John 10 it's only because Jesus first chose you and called out to you.

We can often hear these truths and say: "That's not a God I want to believe in."

Jesus is not a mere man like us. He is fully God and fully man. And with that position of authority comes the humility of faith which says: "He is God and I am not. He is supreme and I am not. He is Lord and I am his servant." Where did Jesus get this power and wisdom? From himself for he is the Son of God, the Second member of the Trinity, the fullness of hope in the fullness of flesh.

And he performed perfectly because you can't. His performance is the only performance which saves because only Jesus lived a sinless life and died for sinful men. The people of Nazareth would rather trust in their own efforts, or even the promise of someone greater, than give worship to the one who was God in the flesh.

We must be sure to not fall to the same trap. Look at how this story ends: **Matthew 13:57-58**. Jesus saw the unbelief and because of that refused to do more than a handful of miracles. Why? Why wouldn't he want them to see his power and believe? Because greater than manipulating men by his might, Jesus wanted to be believed at his word. Jesus was God, not Gandalf.

We must be sure that we do not merely love Jesus because of what he does for us, but we must worship Jesus because who he himself is. He is Lord. And whether we want it or not, that's what we most needed.

The second story occurred at the same time, but in a different part of Israel. In Nazareth we saw Jews wanting the structure of the Old Testament without the savoir of it, and in Herod's palace we see men wanting the comfort of having the prophet of God without having to obey the prophecy of God.

Here's what this story highlights: **Our hearts often want personal comfort over the message of Christ**. Where Nazareth showed men who wanted religion without the person of Jesus. The story of Herod and John the Baptist shows people who want comfort in knowing God without having to obey God.

Now before we dive back into the text I want to give an overview of the primary players and context in story. If you remember way back in Matthew chapter two we read about a Jew who was appointed by the Romans to reign in Israel. This man was called Herod the Great. Herod the Great ended up dividing up his kingdom into three regions which were ruled by his sons: Aristobulus, Herod Antipas [who in this text is called the Tetrarch] and Herod Philip.

Aristobulus had a daughter Herodias, who got married to her uncle Herod Philip. Herod Antipas [the one in our text] loved Herodias, so he took Herodias from Philip to be his wife. John the Baptist, vocally and bravely spoke out against this marriage saying, "You cannot take your brother's wife as your wife."

So Herod had John arrested, but he didn't kill John for two reasons. First, because Mark tell us that Herod actually like John and thought he was a good dude, despite always opposing his love interests.

And second, because the Jews loved John the Baptist. They saw him as their beloved prophet and if Herod killed John he worried that the Jews would revolt against him.

But all of this gets even more complicated on one night where Herod throws a birthday party for himself. Let's read: **Matthew 14:1-12**.

So what do we see in this text? As I mentioned we see hearts pursuing personal comfort over the message of Christ, and that's because in this text we see two groups of people who love the prophet of God, but who refuse to obey the prophecy of God.

The same Jews who loved and revered John the Baptist as a prophet, were also the same Jews who just rejected Jesus in Nazareth. They loved John because he was just like the prophet Elijah whom they loved. He was kind of eccentric but very bold and who had a great love for the people of Israel. But what was John's message? We saw this back in Matthew 3 where John the Baptist's first message was "Repent for the Kingdom of heaven is at hand!" And what did he mean when he said this? Look back at **Matthew 3:11-12**.

John was a prophet, but the role of his prophecy was to point people to Jesus. The irony is that the Jews loved the comfort of knowing they had a modern prophet among them, but they were also completely comfortable ignoring everything he said.

The problem of this is illustrated all the more in the story of Herod. Herod loved his pleasure. He took the wife he wanted, he threw an extravagant party celebrating himself, he dined with the most influential men in his region, he provided enough alcohol to fill the Sea of Galilee, and he did so in order that his contemporaries would see that nothing is outside of his power. So much so that when his daughter came and danced before him, and it pleased him and his guests, he wanted to show how powerful he was. He promised her whatever it was she asked for, for there was nothing great King Herod could not provide.

This is where things got uncomfortable for Herod. Because at the behest of her mother, Salome asked for the head of John the Baptist. Up until that point Herod had held John as a personal amusement and a political bargaining chip. He provided Herod both comfort and pleasure. But now he had to choose what he wanted.

Did he want the prophet of God who spoke the message of God? Or did he want his own comfort and pleasure. What was true for Herod is true of us. We may be paralyzed and kept from fully following Jesus because we always want to hold out for the possibility of something better.

Both the Jews and Herod took comfort from the existence of John the Baptist, but neither of them actually believed him. Neither of them heeded his message. The same can be true of us. We love to worship Jesus, we love to love Jesus, but when it comes down to it we see the commands of Jesus and we say, "I don't want that, I'll wait." Jesus and his message is either our treasure, or it is a threat to what we treasure.

What do I mean when I say that? I mean that it is all too easy to affirm our appreciation for Jesus so long as we do not perceive him as a threat to our comfort. I will hold onto the message of Jesus unless that message means I have to change my sinful tendencies. Then I don't want it.

I want to worship Jesus so long as it only costs me my Sunday mornings. I want to praise Jesus so long as my friends don't think it's weird. I want to obey Jesus so long as I don't have to actually have to obey beyond my own strength. I want to kill sin unless that sin is too close to my heart. If that's the case, I will just accept it and work on the others.

For Herod it was easy to keep John as a representative of God's prophetic word because he wasn't a threat to his comfort. That was true until he was. And when he became a threat, all of the various influencers gave way to a singular commitment. Herod had grief and sadness, but he also had a clear conviction. Beneath our competing options lies the clarity of our sin.

To be apathetic towards to prophetic word of God is to treasure something other than Jesus. When given the option of obeying God, or killing him, we often seek to silence him instead of submitting to him. You might say, "Well he's killing John the Baptist for resisting his marriage, not Jesus for claiming to be God."

That's true. But what of the Jews? There is great irony and foreshadowing in this text. A text where a Roman ruler plays with the fate of man to please the Jews. In Matthew 14 Herod attempts to keep John alive to please the Jews. And In Matthew 27 Pilate condemns Jesus to death to please the Jews.

But it was in Jesus laying down his life because he was not wanted, that he actually became what we needed. Jesus is the Son of God who came to fulfill the message of God.

Are there ways in your life where you have found yourself in Nazareth or Herod's palace? Does Jesus receive exclusive worship because he alone performed to the level of perfection? And he alone died for your imperfection? Do you see the message of God as the word of God? Demanding our hearts and our lives to obey it with joyful submission?

If so, I want you to examine the third group of people in this passage: **Matthew 14:12**.

Now if you remember back in Matthew 11, John's disciples came to Jesus questioning if he was the one, or if there would be someone else. "Are you what we want, or should we wait for another?" That was their question.

Jesus answered them, and for either good or bad reasons they still remained disciples of John. But when John was killed, they went to Jesus. Why? Because they were given the unique opportunity to outlive their former master.

John certainly reminded his disciples that Jesus was the Messiah, and when John was killed, they went to Jesus. The text doesn't tell us why they went to Jesus apart from telling him the news. But what we do know is that if they continued to follow Jesus, they received a prophet who would not be stopped by death. Though he would be killed, it wouldn't be by a man who aggressively took the wife of another. Instead Jesus would be the prophet who willingly laid down his life to acquire his own wife, the church.

Neither the pervasive culture of the Jews not the powerful ruler got what they wanted in this text. The Jews passed up Jesus and missed the Messiah. Herod refused to listen to John the Baptist and eventually the taking of Herodias would lead to a costly war. But it was the men who went to Jesus because they realized they needed to who really got what they always wanted.

You may reject Jesus and his message for a myriad of reasons. He may not check off your boxes, but your boxes are broken. He may not fit in your wants, but we want what is evil. He may threaten your joy, but your joy deceived. And one day your pride, your false pleasures and your stand in Messiahs will also die, and in that moment you will realize that it was the exclusive person and message of Jesus who was what you really needed.

And by God's grace, the need which he solved in Jesus Christ through the gospel is also the greatest experience we could ever want. Consider this in closing, **1 Peter 1:3-5**.

The offer of grace and life is the message of Jesus Christ. And the offer of joy and peace is in our ability to obey him by his grace. If you want that, why wait?