

Sermon Summary – Sunday 19 February 2023

EntitleMEnt (Calven Celliers)

One of the most prominent aspects of our current culture is a widespread sense of entitlement. Entitlement is the belief that we inherently deserve privileges or special treatments, or that we have the right to something. And if we, as believers, are not careful, this sense of entitlement easily crosses over into how we approach our relationship with God. In basic terms we can get to a place where we believe that God owes us; owes us a good and happy life, owes us provision of all our needs, owes us good health and eventually owes us an explanation when we don't get what we believe we're entitled to.

But the reality is that Christians are not *"entitled"* to much in this world. All we actually deserve is death. For all have sinned and fall short (**Romans 3:23**), and the wages of sin is death (**Romans 6:23**). **Read Ephesians 2:8.** Even when it comes to grace, it's a free, undeserved gift from God. Grace is defined as *"God's favour toward the unworthy"* or *"God's benevolence on the undeserving."*

As followers of Christ, we have been called to die to self, which means we no longer live for ourselves – Read **Galatians 2:20** (*If you have a copy of The Message, read it in there as well*). Instead of living with an *"I-focus,"* we are called to live with a *"Jesus-focus."* But as long as our hearts are entitled, personal growth in our relationship with God and with others will cease. One of the ways that entitlement undermines intimacy in our relationship with God is as a result of the pent-up frustration and disillusionment that so often follows when God and people around us don't give us what we foolishly think we deserve.

In the Gospel of Luke 15, Jesus tells a well-known parable of a father and his two sons, both of whom had an entitlement mentality. But let's briefly consider just one of the attitudes so prevalent in entitled people, that the youngest son displays – **Read Luke 15: 11 – 13.** There we see the first tell-tale sign of entitlement, an indulgent view of God. The younger son's attitude toward his father was one-sided and self-centred. He assumed part of the estate belonged to him when it still belonged to his father. The son therefore requested his share of the estate be given to him rather than waiting for it to become his inheritance.

Too often, we can have an indulgent view of God, where we think that God is only in our lives to wait on us; expecting that He should always be there to provide what we want, when we want it, and how we want it. We live in a world of instant gratification. We expect things how we want them and quickly. Unfortunately, that attitude can make its way into our spiritual lives. Too often, I think we view God as a heavenly vending machine. We want something from God, so we pray and expect an instantaneous intervention of sorts. But if that is our view of God, we are greatly mistaken. God is not a vending machine. Our prayers are not a form of payment for His blessings. God does not owe us anything, in fact, we owe Him everything. Too often, believers pray or seek God only when they want something or have a problem and expect Him to show up and give them what they want. But that's not what prayer should be about. Instead, prayer should be a time of seeking God to know God.

"The purpose of prayer is to align, or realign ourselves with God's will and purpose. The purpose of prayer is to surrender our will, not to impose our will." (Andy Stanley – *Grown Up Prayers*)

Our motive should always be to love God, not to use God.

And so in order to avoid falling into this camp, consider the following three simple steps to eradicate a spirit of entitlement, and to save yourself a lot of heart ache and self-imposed frustration.

(1) Diagnose your heart

Read Psalm 139: 23 & 24. The first step to letting go of entitlement is recognizing its presence in our hearts. To get there, we can ask ourselves questions that dig below the surface of our emotions. For example, we can ask ourselves questions like the following:

- In what areas of my life am I discontent?
- Why am I feeling so disappointed right now?
- What do I think I need to live an abundant life?
- How am I comparing my life to someone else's life?

Once we've evaluated our own hearts and found entitlement lurking in the shadows, we do not stay there. Instead, we move from entitlement (*I-focus*) to consecration (*Jesus-focus*).

(2) Remember who God is

Read Psalm 23:1. How was David able to say this? Because he intimately knew the Good Shepherd's heart. He knew that God promises to always love His children; He knew that God would never leave him nor forsake him; He knew that God would always sustain him; He knew that God was enough. Because he knew all those things, he was able to fully trust that God would take care of him — even in *"the valley of the shadow of death."*

"It's not about you. The purpose of your life is far greater than your own personal fulfillment, your peace of mind, or even your happiness. It's far greater than your family, your career, or even your wildest dreams and ambitions. If you want to know why you were placed on this planet, you must begin with God ... focusing on ourselves will never reveal our life's purpose." (Rick Warren – The Purpose Driven Life)

God is good, all the time, and we therefore have everything we need for life and godliness. We can be content in what He chooses to give, and what He chooses to withhold. That doesn't mean we shouldn't pray and ask God for things. But it does mean that if He chooses to say, *"No"* or *"Not yet,"* we can trust that His answers are good and loving, and that He always has our best interests at heart. You were born by His divine purpose and for His divine purpose.

Read Psalm 37:4. It all begins with God, not you! The person who delights themselves in the Lord values the Giver more highly than the gift. Do you want the desires of your heart? Then delight yourself in God.

Isn't it wonderful to live in the knowledge that we don't have to keep looking over our shoulder when know God's got our back?

(3) Imitate your Saviour

Christ is the only One, who has ever been truly entitled. He didn't deserve to bear our sins on the cross. Yet He chose to give up His own desires, His own comforts, and His own pleasures for our eternal good. People with an entitlement mentality often see themselves as superior to others. It's no surprise that this way of thinking affects interpersonal relationships. Most of the decisions an entitled person makes are self-serving. **Read Philippians 2: 5 – 9.** Jesus speaks of a basic Kingdom principle when in the Gospels He tells us that *"the first shall be last and the last shall be first."* Heavens value system is very different from the world's value system. Jesus warns us not to get caught up in the world's ranking system.

When it comes down to it, life isn't about you and me. Life is about Jesus. Life is about loving Him, living for him, and being his hands and feet. In fact, in order to be all that He created us to be, we need to learn to be the exact opposite of entitled. We need to be selfless to others, for God's glory, just as He gave Himself for us.

Entitlement says that we matter more than the people around us. It says we deserve better than what God has chosen to provide, and that our idea of "the plan" is better than the plan that God has set into motion. If we give into an attitude of entitlement, we will start believing selfish ideas about life, which are totally opposed to the truths of Christianity.

One enormous reason that Christianity and entitlement cannot coexist is because we can't live missionally while simultaneously being self-absorbed. If we are focused on our own desires, feelings, and frustrations, we will not be attentive to the spiritual, physical, and emotional needs of those around us. Being oblivious to such things sets us up for failure when it comes to helping others and sharing Christ with them.

Christianity says, *"put Jesus first"* and *"put others above ourselves"*. Christianity calls us to selflessness – Read **Philippians 2: 3 & 4.** When we allow entitlement to take over our thoughts and our hearts, and we give into our own selfish nature, we will be too caught up in our own issues to take notice of the hurting world around us, and we will fail to commune as fully with God as we otherwise could.