

Week 8: April 23

The Gospel in Our Actions

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Day 1

Most of us have probably heard the proverb, “actions speak louder than words”. In fact, the phrase is so popular, Google Docs suggested it in autocorrect as I typed this devotional! This metaphor was first coined in 1692 by Massachusetts native, Reverend Gersham Bulkeley. Needless to say, it has stood the test of time. And I think that’s because there is some truth to this proverb. Many times, our actions can be just as compelling as the words we speak.

Another popular concept you have probably heard of is the Five Love Languages. The Five Love Languages are significant because “different people with different personalities give and receive love in different ways. By learning to recognize these preferences in yourself and in your loved ones, you can learn to identify the root of your conflicts, connect more profoundly, and truly begin to grow closer.” - Five Love Languages website

The Five Love Languages are...

- Acts of Service
- Receiving Gifts
- Quality Time
- Words of Affirmation
- Physical Touch

I find it curious that of all the different ways human beings prefer to be loved, four of the five are driven by actions. Of course, they can all be accompanied by our words and words mean the world to the “Words of Affirmation” people out there (I’m one of them!). However, when it comes to feeling loved, a large majority of people would say, “actions speak louder than words.”

With all of that being said, here is another curious thought. We are constantly quoting the words of Jesus. And rightfully so! He was the most brilliant Rabbi (teacher) in the history of humanity! But, how often do we take the time to really sit and ponder the *actions* of Jesus? How did He love through His actions? Did His actions ever speak louder than words? Check this out:

“It was just before the Passover Festival. Jesus knew that the hour had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to

the end. The evening meal was in progress, and the devil had already prompted Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot, to betray Jesus. Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God; so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him." - John 13:1-5

In this passage, Jesus knew His life was coming to an end. He knew He was about to be betrayed by a close friend. And He knew the fate of the human race and their relationship with God had been put in His hands. The battle for *us* was about to begin on the cross. Yet, here's Jesus, scrubbing the dirt off the smelly feet of his students. That's just who He is. No person is less than. No person is unworthy of love. Here is Jesus, the servant King of the world, ready to go before us and make us clean in more ways than one. "...the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." - Matthew 20:28

This is just one of the countless examples of how Jesus expressed the Gospel through His actions. For the rest of today, consider the *actions* of Jesus in Scripture and in your life.

1. How have Jesus' actions impacted your life?
2. How do they make you feel? Take in the loving actions of Jesus today.

Day 2

When I was growing up, I was never the shining example of a “good kid.” Yeah, I didn’t smoke weed like some of my friends and I got straight B’s in school, but I wasn’t a saint either. Looking back at my adolescent years, my parents like to say that I was a “silent rebel”. If I thought my chores didn’t need to be done, I wouldn’t do them. If a homework assignment was too long, I didn’t do it. I stayed out as late as I wanted to, went where I wanted to go, and did what I wanted to do, which wasn’t always very Christlike. I wasn’t fighting my parents. I just did what was right in my own eyes...which you probably know is ‘bad news bears’. Don’t believe me? Check out the book of Judges.

So, when I hear the Apostle Peter call me a part of a “royal priesthood”, it’s kind of hard to not chuckle at the thought. Peter wrote, “But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God’s people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul. Keep your conduct among the gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.” - 1 Peter 2:9-12

The Apostle Paul also describes this concept when he calls the Corinthian Christians “Christ’s ambassadors” (2 Corinthians 5:20). Both of these passages tell us we are to be Christ’s representatives in this world! How we treat our relationships and what we do/don’t do reflects how fluent we are in the Gospel. Jeff Vanderstelt, the author of the Gospel Fluency book argues that oftentimes, Gospel-centered behavior is *caught*, not taught. If you’re a parent, you may have noticed that many times your kids will imitate what you do much quicker than they will obey what you say. The same goes for the Gospel. If people see the Gospel reflected in your actions, they are much more likely to experience Jesus than if you just preached to them from a street corner. This all begs the question, how are you doing? Do your actions reflect the Gospel?

I know that can seem like a lot of pressure. Especially if you don’t see yourself as a great example like me. Sometimes when I hear that 1st Peter passage spoken over me, I picture myself dressed as a Greek Orthodox priest and it’s easy just to think, “Hey Peter, that’s a nice thought, but that just isn’t me. I don’t fit in this role of a royal priest...or in this attire”. But, take a look at that passage again. Peter is much more interested in reminding the church in Asia Minor who they are called to *be*, rather than just giving them a list of things to *do*. It’s all about

embodying the Kingdom of God with their actions and taking on this identity that was given to them by Jesus.

Remember the whole point of this series: to be able to think, speak, and do the Gospel in your everyday life. If we think that our actions define us and determine if God loves us, that's not a Gospel mindset. Jesus is the one who defines us and He calls us children of God. Our desire for Gospel-centered actions should flow from a desire to see His kingdom on earth as in Heaven, not just justify ourselves before God (we couldn't even do that ourselves if we wanted to). So as you seek to be a part of this messy royal priesthood called the Church, remember that yes, we are called to align our actions with the Gospel, but your imperfection doesn't disqualify you from this family on mission. Our actions do matter and sometimes they do speak louder than words, but they aren't our identity.

Today, think back on your story:

1. When have the actions of others touched your heart in a deep way and when have they brought you immense pain?
2. What about your actions? How have your actions left positive and negative impacts?
3. Then, think of 2-3 Gospel-centered actions you can practice this week.

Day 3

Okay, so you probably get it by now. Actions can speak louder than words and we are called to be a royal priesthood, a.k.a. God's people who embody the values of His kingdom through our actions. But...like...where do you even start? For each of us, there are tons of things we could find in our lives that are not aligned with the Gospel. We all have our areas of unbelief. I know figuring out how to live out the Gospel with our actions can be daunting, but the starting point might be much simpler than you think.

The beauty of that 1st Peter passage we talked about is that it harkens back to God's original design for humanity: to be His image bearers (Genesis 1:26), His representatives who rule over Creation. The cultural context of this passage makes it even more significant. In the ancient world, many kings ruled over vast pieces of land. Most people didn't have access to maps, so kings needed a way to let people know who the land belonged to. So, they would stamp their image onto pieces of metal and mount them on large posts. These signs would not only mark territory, but were believed to embody the king's presence, watching over the land. To the people of these lands, the image-bearing signs *were* the king's presence even when he wasn't physically there. In light of that short history lesson, when God creates humanity in His image, He is saying that we embody His presence and declare His rule over the rest of Creation. It's a beautiful honor and humanity doesn't have to do anything to earn it. We just *are* the image of God because we are human. We are meant to reflect God's presence in the world.

Therefore, it seems that a good starting point to living out the Gospel in our actions is to *be present* as an image bearer of God. Just be present. Or even simpler, just *be*. Wait...that's it? Yup! Sorry...no refunds. But seriously, that's the first step! Being present with others can be an incredibly Gospel-centered action and can mean so much to people, especially those who have a "quality time" love language. And especially in an age where we are so overbusy and over-stimulated by entertainment and devices. Being *fully* present with others is becoming more and more of a rarity.

I'm always amazed at how students light-up and get excited when I come to watch their extracurricular activities, whether it's a sporting event, play/musical, or a recital. Honestly, it's one of the easiest parts of being a Student Pastor. There's no program. No agenda. No real work involved. I just show up and watch students do what they're passionate about. But it means the world to them that I took the time to come and see them. It's humbling to know that my presence makes a difference. But honestly, it can be really easy to skip this part of my role because busyness is always calling and the to-do list is always piling up. And a lot of that other

stuff is important, but I need to remind myself that just being present can be one of the most effective ways I can minister to students.

I encourage you to take this first step in embodying the Gospel through your actions:

1. Take some time to consider how you can be more present in your relationships. How can you better support the ones you love?
2. How can you be more attentive to their needs and desires? A great place to practice this is with a life group at Daybreak.
3. Going further, how can you be more present in your relationship with Jesus?

Day 4

As you step into living out the Gospel through your actions, continue to reflect on how you can be present in your relationships:

1. How can you see those around you through the eyes of Jesus?
2. How can you slow down and make the most of the moments you have with friends and family?
3. How can you affirm others and be gracious with those who test your patience?

After you reflect on these questions, take some time to be present with Jesus. Listen to the song, [“Not in a Hurry” by Will Reagan](#). This song talks about how sitting in the presence of the Lord gives us opportunities to hear His voice and allows His presence to transform our lives. Make the lyrics of this song part of your prayers for today.