

Taking The Wrong Cue

Introduction

- A. **Exodus 32:1-10.** There are a couple of things about this story that I want you to notice with me.
1. First, this situation was served to test the faith of Israel. Throughout their journey from Egypt to Mt. Sinai, Israel had doubted God and complained about Him. With each complaint, God had supplied what they needed, demonstrating that the people could trust Him. Now this trust is being tested. Moses had been on the mountain for weeks and the people were growing anxious. What had become of this man who served as their connection with God? Had he left them? Had God killed him for some evil thing he had done? As the days passed, the people began to panic. If Moses was gone, they would need a new way to connect with God. So, they insist that Aaron make an idol for them.
 2. Second, this was not an attempt to worship pagan gods. They were trying to connect with Jehovah (**32:4,5**). But where did this idea come from...to connect with God by molding gold into the image of a calf? The text does not answer that question, but I think there are some plausible explanations. They had just left Egypt where they had watched the Egyptians worship their god Apis, whose image took the appearance of a bull. Some suggest that this image served as a model of the image Aaron made.
 3. Third, God addressed this issue. When they first arrived at Mt. Sinai, God Himself spoke to them about how He was to be worshipped (**Exodus 20:4**). The kind of image Aaron made was absolutely forbidden; the language was clear and definite. So how did this happen?
 4. Fourth, Israel took the wrong cue. Instead of listening to God and following the instructions they had been given about worship, they took their cue from the Egyptians. Think about it: the pattern for their worship of Jehovah was drawn from people WHO KNEW NOTHING about how God was to be worshipped.
 5. Fifth, God was not pleased (**vs. 7-10**). It has never been enough to simply seek God. If we are to honor Him and please Him, we must seek Him according to His will. We must honor Him in the way that He wants to be honored.
- B. It is easy to read this story and marvel at the foolishness of these people. How could they ever imagine that they could learn how to worship Jehovah by taking their cue from the Egyptians?
1. But are we really that far removed from this mindset? I want to suggest that we face the danger of making a mistake not unlike the one that Israel made at the base of Mt. Sinai. If we are not cautious, we can take our cue from wrong sources and wind up doing things that displease God.
 2. We are trying to serve God in a world filled with all kinds of ideas about how we ought to worship and what we ought to be doing for Him. If we are not careful, we may find ourselves looking around at what others are doing that seems new, or exciting, or that draws a crowd, and begin to think that we ought to do those things too. It is really easy to fall into the trap of doing what others are doing, without considering what God wants us to do.
 3. I want to highlight two areas where this danger is particularly strong; two areas where we need to make sure that we take our cue from God.

The Worship We Offer To God

- A. You may have noticed that many churches are now offering a contemporary worship service for their members.
1. What is this contemporary service; what does it look like? It starts with the music. There will be no congregational singing and traditional hymns. Instead, there will be a band with professional singers raising the roof with modern songs that sound a lot like soft-rock music. The crowd will be on its feet, waving their hands back and forth and cheering or singing along. It looks sort of like a spiritual rock concert. At some point the speaker will address the crowd - usually in jeans and tennis shoes. His message will be short and devotional with only a passing reference to scripture.
 2. But it is an approach to worship that really seems to draw a crowd. As a result, more and more religious groups now offer a contemporary option.
 3. Even among disciples, there are some who are drawn to this approach. These services just seem so alive and full of passion. Sometimes our services just don't seem so exciting. Some would conclude that perhaps we should learn from the religious groups around us and make our worship services a bit more like theirs.
- B. If we cave to that pressure, then we will be taking our cue for the wrong source.
1. Few churches have done more to promote this contemporary approach to worship than the Willow Creek Community Church. For more than 30 years, this group has not only drawn thousands each week to their contemporary styled worship service, but they helped other groups all over the country develop this same approach. But where did this idea come from? In the case of Willow Creek, it came from their community. Back in 1975, they started surveying people in their community who did not attend worship services. They wanted to know what kept them away. Using this data, they designed a service that would draw this target audience (show-biz service, soft-sell sermons). Their efforts met with amazing success. Over the next fifteen years, their attendance swelled to more than 14,000. (USA Weekend, April 15, 1990)
 2. But we cannot allow the size of the crowd to blind us to the fundamental flaw in their approach. Think about it: should churches decide how to worship God based on the feedback of people who are not interested in worshipping God? Is that really the right path? And, if this is where these groups take their cue, should we be taking our cue from them?
 3. As we decide how to honor God with our worship, there are some basic facts that we must keep in front of us.
 - a. Worship is first God directed (**Ephesians 5:19**, it's "to the Lord"). Our objective is not to entertain ourselves, but to praise and honor God.
 - b. The only way we can know how to honor God is by looking at what He said about worship. Obviously, not just anything we offer up is acceptable (Cain and Abel, **Genesis 4:3-5**; Israel and Idols, **Exodus 20:4**). To honor and please God, we must worship Him the way He desires to be worshipped.
 - c. Worship is to be offered in spirit and truth (**John 4:23-24**). Worshiping in truth requires that we follow what God says about HOW He is to be worshipped. Worshiping in spirit requires that we worship from the heart. Worship is to be more than simply going mechanically through a series of activities.
 - d. The presence of one element does not eliminate the need for the other. Just because people are passionate does not mean that what they do is not important. And simply because the right activities are done in the right ways does not mean that our hearts are unimportant to God.

Summary: When it comes to worship, we need take the right cue. We don't need to be looking at the denominations around us. Only God should guide us.

The Work We Do With Our Youth

- A. I get calls periodically from people who are interested in joining our group and who want to know more about us.
1. Sometimes they will ask, "What kinds of programs do you have for the kids?" I explain that we offer Bible classes on Sunday and Wednesday with a curriculum designed to help kids really learn God's will for their lives. And I add that we have families who host devotions in their homes to give the kids an opportunity to talk about God's will in a more informal setting. I sometimes add that our kids enjoy getting together to do all kinds of stuff (movie night; basket ball; Chic-fil-a, etc.), but these activities are planned by the kids or their families. It is not part of our work as a church.
 2. It's at this point that I usually sense impatience on the other end of the line. Sometimes they will ask, "Is that all?" I understand their frustration. Coming from other places people have much higher expectations. Most churches have a much larger menu of activities for their young people. I went to the web a couple of weeks ago and made a list. Most have an entire section of the website devoted to youth and the activities they offer. These included...
- a youth concert
 - a dodge ball tournament
 - a lock in
 - a wacky, tacky christmas party
 - a Muck Fest (promised messy fun games)
 - a pizza night with a volleyball tournament
 - a TRX Suspension Training (promised to train youth like the navy seals and help them get into shape)
 - a school for the performing arts (dance - jazz, hip hop; theatre arts; private music lessons)

With so many activities to coordinate, churches must have a paid staff member (in larger churches more than one) whose job it is to coordinate it all, the youth minister. And it's this way in almost every place.

3. If we're not careful, we can look at all those offerings that other religious groups provide and begin to believe that we just aren't doing enough for our kids. Have you ever felt that way - perhaps even said those words?
- B. But if we give in to that feeling and start doing what other churches are doing, we will be taking the wrong cue...and we certainly do not want to be taking our cue about our work with our kids from the denominations.
1. First, the youth group movement is not working. The theory was, if you provide kids with all these fun activities in connection with the church, it would keep them coming. It hasn't. Somewhere between 60%-90% (depends on whose survey you believe) of kids who grow up in youth groups will stop attending church when they leave high school. In fact, there are some in the denominational world who are beginning to suggest that this youth group movement needs to be reevaluated because it is not working. Why would we want to take their cue?
 2. Second, the youth group movement de-emphasizes what kids really need. Many of the activities that churches have for youth may be fun, but they do little to help kids know God and His will for their lives. If we want our kids to be wise, to avoid sin and live pure lives, then they need to learn to love God and to be passionate about pleasing Him (**Psalm 119:9,11,99**). It's interesting that many in the denominational world who are questioning the youth group movement are making the same point - that they need to get back to teaching kids the Bible. Beyond this, God never made it the mission of His church to serve as a recreational center for the youth. We are not authorized be providing these kinds of activities. Kids have lots of opportunities to play basketball and eat pizza. Parents can help ensure that they do this with a good crowd. Our attention as a congregation needs to be focused on what they need most - to learn the will of God for their lives.
 3. Third, the youth group movement disengages parents from the process. I suspect most would complain that this is not the intent, but it is happening. I had one youth group leader complain that parents were dropping off their kids with him and expecting him to do their spiritual training. What makes this worse is the fact that it is often an inexperienced college kid who is given this job. The Bible teaches us that the task of spiritually training children belongs to parents (**Deuteronomy 6:4-9; Ephesians 6:4**). Whatever we may supply in the way of teaching as part of our work as a church would be a very small supplement to what is primarily parent's work.

Summary: When it comes to our work with kids - with so much at stake and so many being lost - let's make sure we don't take the wrong cue. Let's look to God's word to guide, not what the church down the street might be doing.

Conclusion: And when it comes to my salvation, I need to be sure that I take my cue from God.