***VOICELESS SERMON WEEK 2***

The Prayer Meeting - *Tolerance of Sin and the Sin of Complacency*

35:25 - 37:26

This is the second week in a four-part series where we will begin each week with a clip from the movie *Voiceless*, a movie about a man and his mission to the heart of Philadelphia. He is called by God to help pregnant women in crisis and take action on the abortion clinic that is across the street from his church. We want to take this time in this series as an opportunity to learn more about God’s heart on the issue of abortion, and also to learn more generally about His calling on our lives and the way He has called us out of sin and into a life of forgiveness and redemption through following Jesus.

Let’s pray: *Father, let us see where we are falling short in following You. Help us to take an honest look at our lives and to challenge our tolerance and our complacency so that we can continue to do Your work in this world. We continue to ask that Your hand be over the issues of abortion and human rights in our world, and that Your justice and Your grace would prevail in our community, country, and world.*

Before we really begin: I said almost these exact words last week, and I plan to remind you of this every week of this series, so allow me to clear the air on this topic once again. This movie makes it clear that abortion is wrong and that we have the responsibility to fight against the murder of unborn children. The film does not mince words. And I do not want to mince words with you: abortion is evil; it is a sin. **But** if you are here today and you have had an abortion or been part of the decision to have an abortion (I’m speaking to all of you, because men are oftentimes equally or even more responsible for these decisions), and you know the heart of God and have accepted His *eternal* forgiveness through belief in Jesus by grace, then the Lord does not condemn you. His forgiveness is eternal, thus wiping out the consequences of sin past, present, and future. You are not marked as murderer, as sinner, or as unclean. You are marked as pure, and we believe that God has mercy on the innocent, including on children who have no voice and no say.

Similarly, I want to remind you that shaming, pointing fingers, mocking, or condemning *anyone* is a sin. If you are or have been one of those among the Christian Church who has chosen to publicly condemn people for their sins, especially on this topic of abortion, or on sexual immorality, then you have been a hypocrite, and you are among those who blemish the world’s view of Jesus. You are one of the ones whom Jesus is referring to when He calls the Pharisees a “brood of vipers.” You use the shame of others to make yourself feel more holy and all the while you are walking in the opposite direction of Jesus. But just as those who have been involved in this sin of abortion are completely forgiven and told to go about their way and sin no more, so are you forgiven through faith by the grace of Jesus. You are not marked as hypocrite or as one who casts shade on others. So go, and leave your life of sin.

Again, if you have dealt with ANY sin that this series deals with, understand that God does not condemn you if you have come to Him and asked for forgiveness.

Now, let’s get started.

A reading from 1 Timothy 5:8: “But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever” (NASB).

Last week, we talked about God’s calling and His purpose for your life and how you can pursue an understanding of God’s will for you. We also talked about the calling God has placed on the Church as a whole to protect His children and to care for His people.

Today, we are going to focus on two things:

1. The sin of neglect / complacency
2. The sin of tolerance

First, I’ll be speaking on the subject of neglect. As you can see from the verse we will focus on today, God clearly says that if we neglect our people, then we are essentially neglecting Him. How so? Well, this theme is riddled all throughout the New Testament as we see Jesus saying that those who care for His people will inherit the Kingdom of Heaven: “Truly, I say to you, as you [helped and cared for] one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me” (Matthew 25:40, ESV).

Paul says in Galatians 4, we become God’s sons and daughters through our faith in Jesus. Because we are sons and daughters, we have become heirs-- Heirs to God’s kingdom and therefore a part of His household! Brothers and sisters, if we want to lay claim to the kingdom and household of God, we should take the words of 1 Timothy 5:8 seriously. When we neglect the people of God and His household, we are neglecting the inheritance that is promised to us.

This week we are focusing on the sin of complacency and our fight against the tolerance of sin. The greatest evil we face as a cultureis that we have lost our passion in the fight against sin. In Matthew 24:12-13, Jesus says, “Lawlessness will be increased, the love of many will grow cold. But the one who endures to the end will be saved” (ESV). When our culture picks and chooses which issues are important and which we should turn our heads from and tolerate with indifference, evil abounds and triumphs. Do not be fooled: the fight against abortion is NOT the only or even the primary issue that the Church needs to face today. We have grown tolerant of greed and selfishness, we have forgotten to be generous, we have stood by and allowed people to justify their adultery and immorality and impurity. How many of us take seriously the command to keep the Sabbath? There are sins all through our lives that we have chosen to stop treating as if they are sins at all.

Yes, this series will largely be about how we want to take proper and Godly steps forward in the fight against abortion, but there is a larger evil that we are fighting against, and that is the tolerance of sin and the complacency in our lives.

Did you know that Jesus *never* promised you would be comfortable? In fact, the Bible often promises believers the opposite of prosperity and comfort. Following Jesus is a radical decision that requires sacrifice, generosity, and humility. It will never be easy: “I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world” (John 16:33, ESV). Or, in other words, the Christian life is not a comfortable life, but it is a fulfilling one.

We see in the final book of the Bible, Revelation that God says He will spit the lukewarm out of His mouth because being neither hot nor cold (that is, spiritually hot or spiritually cold) is as great an evil as being against God altogether. He says that the way to overcome our lukewarm state is to be *zealous*. The word Zealous means “to have great enthusiasm for a cause or an objective.” So let me ask: Did the members of this church prayer meeting in the film seem to be zealous to you?

No. They made justifications about why they should not pursue justice and righteousness in this world to bring forth the Kingdom of Heaven. They said, just as many of you have likely said, “We are already doing enough. There are positives to clinics like this one. We don’t want the church to be involved in the political arena.”

My brothers and sisters, we are weak and foolish! We are too cowardly. Stand up for what we believe is our God-given responsibility. We have also fallen prey to the lie that there is no place for the Church in politics or in social justice issues. We have taken the bait that we cannot provide good care for women and ~~for~~ all people without also allowing abortions and other practices! Worst of all, we have seen how the Christian Church is portrayed in media and said, “We are already doing enough . . . or perhaps we are even doing too much.” We are fearful of seeming like radicals.

This should not be so andthe sin of complacency is one that will make you stagnant,passionless and useless in your faith. We serve a God who is not complacent . . . and He is not tolerant of sin.

Our culture has been telling us for decades that the way to be a good and decent human being is to “coexist” and to be tolerant of all things that all people choose for themselves. The world believes that this is the meaning of “do not judge” and the Christian Church has it all wrong because we still believe in the difference between good and evil. We have been told that moral truth is different for each of us and that we can all choose what is good for us or what is bad for us. God says otherwise. He gives us the law to show us right from wrong~~. and~~ He gives us Jesus to save us from the consequences of disobeying that law, but even in His great mercy, God still hates sin.

There are many ways that God has shown grace and mercy. We should be looking to Jesus’s model of balance between tolerance and zealousness so that we can model our lives and our responses after Him when it comes to important issues.

If you follow Jesus through the four Gospels, you will see that in many cases, Jesus chose not to condemn people for their sins. In John 8, we see the story of a woman caught in adultery. She has been pulled from bed with a man who is not her husband, she is likely naked or only covered by a bed sheet, and the Pharisees bring her before Jesus and say that they want to stone her, because in Jewish law, this sin is punishable by death. And Jesus’s response, I believe, is a response full of grace, but I do not believe it is one of tolerance. And the woman is shown a life-saving act of mercy as Jesus gives the famous line, “Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone” (John 8:7, ESV).

You could surely say that in this moment, Jesus shows the woman grace and mercy, but let’s read on: “But when they heard it, they went away . . . and Jesus was left alone with the woman standing before him. Jesus stood up and said to her, ‘Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?’ She said, ‘No one, Lord.’ And Jesus said, ‘Neither do I condemn you; go, and from now on sin no more’” (John 8:9-11, ESV). Jesus does not condemn the woman in the story! He shows her a life-saving act of grace and mercy. But what else does it say right here in the end? *Go, and from now on sin no more*. Jesus is gracious and merciful, and He also has no tolerance for sin.

Do you see the other act of grace in this story? Jesus, the Creator God, stands before an entire crowd of men who want to judge and kill a woman for her sin. He looks these self-righteous men in the eyes and He sees their sin. The Bible says that God knows you and knows everything you’ve ever done!

I know that if I was in Jesus’s situation, I would want to point at each of those men, to poke them in the chest and say, “You are doing \_\_\_\_\_\_!” and call out their individual sins, one by one, shaming them for what they have done and how they wish to kill someone else, while they themselves deserve the same punishment of death. But Jesus, in His great mercy, says, “Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her” (John 8:7, ESV). And through these words, He grants everyone in the vicinity the opportunity to abandon their sin and walk away forgiven.

What types of sin are we tolerating in our own lives? We tolerate sin when we do these things:

1. We assure ourselves that we have already done enough.
2. We justify evil practices by compensating with good works.
3. We bargain with God,.
4. We allow our sins to be our comfort and forget that they are wrong.
5. We pray that God would remove a sin from our life but take no steps to overcome it.

What do we need to do to show this world that we do not tolerate sin or evil? Is the answer to picket at locations across the country and chant that abortion, or any other issue, is evil? Should we hand out pamphlets in front of a clinic like this about the truth of abortion? Perhaps we could write letters to congress and vote only for politicians who make this a priority.

These ideas might be acceptable in some cases. But the challenge we see through the way Jesus lived is to show the world that we don’t tolerate sin or evil with our lifestyles and with the way we help others. You can volunteer at a crisis center, you can get involved with many ministries that focus on taking care of women who are struggling during their pregnancies, you can offer housing or support to a woman or family who needs it, you can educate yourself on the beauty of adoption and be willing to adopt a child into your own family should God call you to do that or grant you the resources to do so. These are just a few of the countless ways that we can begin to approach this situation differently.

I don’t want the individuals in our church to be the kind of people that say, as we saw in this scene, “Well they do offer some good services,” and justify evil. I don’t want to hear people say, “We shouldn’t be involved in politics,” when God has told us that neglect is sin. I don’t want us to assure ourselves that “We filed a grievance or something against one of their advertisements that one time,” and somehow think that’s enough.

I want us to stand up for the voiceless with grace for the people caught in this evil, and I want our church to fight against the sin of neglect and the sin of complacency.

Closing prayer: *Father, forgive us for tolerating sin in our lives. Forgive us for trying to justify or hide our sin from You. We invite You to search our hearts and to give us a passion for Your people. Show us how You would like us to fight against the evil in this world, and grant us the presence of Your Spirit, that Your heavenly kingdom may be brought here to Earth. Amen.*