

“Who Is Trying to Get Your Attention?”

John 6:41-51

Preaching by

Dr. Robert F. Browning, Pastor

Smoke Rise Baptist Church

Stone Mountain, Georgia

August 16, 2009

My father’s mother lived to be ninety-six. Her hearing was almost gone in her latter years, or so we thought. Most of the time she looked at television or read while we carried on a conversation, ignoring what we had to say. To our surprise, though, if we said something about her, she would speak up and make a comment. We realized she was not totally deaf; she just had “selective hearing.”

Do you know anyone who has selective hearing? Do you have it? Of course, at times we all do.

Are you tuning anyone out at this time in your life? Is someone telling you something that you do not want to hear? How many ways has that person said it and for how long? Why do you not want to hear it? What do you think you are missing?

For me, these questions flow out of today’s text. Crowds have followed Jesus to Capernaum the day after he coordinated the feeding of the five thousand. Jesus was aware that they were in search of more food, but he was more interested in talking about feeding their spirits than their stomachs. “I am the bread of life,” he said to them. “Whoever comes to me will never be hungry and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty” John 6:35.

Two things appear obvious in John 6. Jesus believed that one man could change the dialogue about God and faith and the religious leaders did not want to hear what he had to say. The more he talked, the more they challenged what he had to say and his right to say it. Like their ancestors in the wilderness in Moses’ day, they began grumbling, complaining and offering resistance.

“Then the Jews began to complain about him because he said, ‘I am the bread that came down from heaven.’ They were saying, ‘Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How can he now say, ‘I have come down from heaven?’ ” John 6:41-2.

Why didn’t they want to hear what Jesus had to say? There appear to be two reasons. They did not think he had the proper credentials. He was a common carpenter from humble beginnings who had no formal religious training. What could he teach them? Who gave him the right to express these bold and fresh ideas?

In addition, they did not approve of what he was saying. He was reinterpreting the ancient texts and placing new expectations upon them. It was clear that he valued relationships over rules, people over things, bridges over walls, generosity over greed, conversation over conflict, peace over war, transparency over secrecy, humility over arrogance, serving over being served and the power of love over the love of power. This was not their agenda and neither did they want it to be. Something had to be done. So, what did they do?

They shut him out of their lives by closing their ears, eyes, hearts and minds. They belittled and undermined him by questioning his right to speak. In the end, they sought to silence him by having him persecuted.

What did they miss? According to John, they missed a lot, including meaningful dialogue that could have led to a deeper understanding of faith and life. They missed an opportunity to gain the trust and respect of the people they were called to serve and partner with

Jesus to make the world better. It appears that they missed the things that truly make life fulfilling and meaningful. What a high price to pay to have the final word, if not the only word, and have their way.

Let's not be too hard on the religious leaders of Jesus' time, though. **Do you have people around you saying things you do not want to hear?** Are they trying to warn you of danger? Do they want to talk to you about your values and priorities? Are they concerned about the friends you are running with, the decisions you are making and the way you are behaving? Do they think you are not living up to your potential?

Why do you not want to hear what they have to say? Of what are you afraid? Could you be living in denial? Are you being selfish or stubborn? Are you hiding something? Are you distracted?

Why do you think they have not given up? Could it be that they love you too much to walk away and let you go? Do they love you more than you love yourself right now?

Could they be thinking back to a time in their life when someone did not give up on them? Maybe they have been where you are and want to help you like someone helped them.

What do you think you are missing by not listening and talking? Like those who refused to listen to Jesus, could you be missing out on some meaningful dialogue about life and faith that could lead to substantial growth and maturity? Could you be overlooking the fact that there are people around you who deeply love and care for you and want to help you with your struggles?

What do you think you should do? I wonder what Michael Jackson would tell us if he could speak? What would Mark Sanford, the Governor of South Carolina or Rick Pitino, the University of Louisville basketball coach, say to us? What would Jesus advise us to do?

What did Jesus want the religious leaders to do? I believe he wanted them to do what Nicodemus did, put down their defenses and talk. He knew they were struggling with his fresh ideas and new ways of looking at faith, religion, life and relationships. He would put them at ease, though, if they would just come to the table. He would treat them with the same respect and dignity he did Nicodemus and the woman at the well.

How encouraging it would have been had the religious leaders sat down with Jesus and said, "What do you mean that you are the bread of life come down from heaven? What do you know about God, life and faith that we don't? What is your concept of leadership? What do you think people need from us? How can we nourish their spirits and meet their needs the way you do? What motivates and inspires you? What is your source of wisdom, courage and strength?" What a difference these questions could have made.

What difference would it make in your life if you talked to those who are reaching out to you? What would happen if you lowered your defenses and listened with an open mind? What if you suspended your understanding of truth long enough to see life from others' perspectives, like Jesus encouraged Nicodemus to do? Are you willing to set aside pride, denial, selfishness, indifference or cynicism to respond to those who care enough to reach out to you?

Why not begin by opening your heart to Jesus this morning. Talk to him about your struggle. Ask him for wisdom and guidance. Talk to him about how to overcome those things that keep you from listening to others. Make the words of this chorus your prayer today.

Open the eyes of my heart, Lord; open the eyes of my heart.

I want to see you. I want to see you.

When you see him, I think you will see and hear others differently.

