



1. What were some of your key takeaways from the sermon?

"Hi my name is _____ , and I'm an approval addict".

Does your name belong in that blank space? Do you crave the approval of others? Do you live in bondage to what other people think of you? Do you feel enslaved by your need to be affirmed, liked, and loved by the people around you? Perhaps, like most people in today's culture, you suffer from "approval addiction".

If your not sure, this list might be of use. Which of these ring true for you?

- You frequently feel hurt or offended by what others say about you.
- You respond defensively to any sort of feedback or criticism, even when it's warranted.
- You constantly compare yourself to those around you.
- You're often a different person when no one's watching you, or in the safety of your home. In fact, one of your constant fears is that you'll be found out as a fraud or an imposter.
- You get envious when others succeed (particularly those close to you), and you feel a bit better about yourself if they fail
- You try to impress people who you think are important, but you make less effort with those who aren't.
- You're afraid of people actually knowing you deeply and personally, so you avoid being vulnerable at all costs.
- You post a lot on social media, and closely monitor your comments and likes. (not only how many you get but who is giving them)
- You are very involved in ministry. But you rarely do behind the scenes roles (unless someone you think is important asks you).
- If you do volunteer for something, you need to be recognized.

- If you aren't thanked (or you don't receive enough thanks) you feel annoyed, like you wasted your time, or you grumble to your friends, saying things like "after all that work they barely even thanked me".
 - And, in all of this, you still live with a nagging sense that you aren't good enough, special enough, gifted enough, popular enough, smart enough, attractive enough, wealthy enough, healthy enough etc. etc. etc.
2. What stood out to you from this list? What are some of the ways approval addiction surfaces in your life?

If you want to grow as a disciple, you must address your 'approval addiction'. Think about it... How can we possibly follow the radical call of discipleship, to "pick up our cross and follow" Jesus, whilst trying to be liked, avoid criticism, rejection and persecution. You can't! The cross is the ultimate image of human rejection, the ultimate criticism, and the ultimate shame. And yet it is to the cross of Christ that we are beckoned when we decide to follow Jesus.

You can't follow Jesus and always please people. Sure, the two may often overlap, but at critical moments the path of discipleship and the path of the world diverge... so which path will you choose?

3. Henri Nouwen states: "At issue here is the question "to whom do I belong? God or the world?" Examining your own life, how would you answer that question?"

Read Matthew 6: 1-6

4. What's motivating the giving of those in verse 1-2, or the praying of those in verse 5?
5. We may not literally "blow trumpets" to draw attention to our good works, but in what way do we seek "to be seen" and "to be honored"? What does this say about our motivations?
6. What do you think Jesus means when he says "very truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full?"

Here's the thing. If you are seeking human approval, then that brief moment of glory, that word of praise, that public recognition, those likes on facebook - that fleeting moment of approval... *that's as good as it gets*. That's your reward.

Approval addicts are rewarded with a shallow and superficial subspecies of love. It's a kind of love that never actually satisfies, and leaves us craving more and more. It's where we are loved, not for who we actually are, but for who we appear to be. People don't actually love us, they love a curated version of us, the version we allow to be seen. They love our public self, our polished self, rather than our true self.

But what we actually want, more than anything, is to be **fully known and truly loved**.

7. Read and discuss this quote from Timothy Keller:

"To be loved but not known is comforting but superficial. To be known and not loved is our greatest fear. But to be fully known and truly loved is, well, a lot like being loved by God. It is what we need more than anything. It liberates us from pretense, humbles us out of our self-righteousness, and fortifies us for any difficulty life can throw at us."

8. What strategy does Jesus offer us in v 3-4, and v 6 to combat our approval addiction? Why is it effective?
9. What might it look like for you to form a habit of "practicing your righteousness" in secret? What practical steps can you take?
10. Jesus promises us that God will reward what is done in secret. What do you think this reward is?

Christ's love is our reward. In Christ we are fully known and fully loved. He knows our good bits, both what's done in public and in secret. He also knows our worst bits, even the secret stuff that we fear others might find out. He knows it all, and he loves us! As Romans 5:8 says, "this is how we know what love is: while we were still sinners, Christ died for us". This love frees us from our bondage to the unsatisfying narcotic of humans praise, and empowers us to live fully for Jesus, walking in his abundant grace.