Bread and Circus

Acts 12:2-3 and Matthew 11:12

Read it. Talk about it. Live it.

Bread and Circus

BASED ON ACTS 12:2-3 AND MATTHEW 11:12

Overview

This sermon challenges believers to resist the distractions of modern life and pursue a deeper, more intentional relationship with God. Drawing on the Roman concept of "bread and circus" -- the practice of keeping people passive through food and entertainment -- the message calls the church to fight past complacency and engage with the kingdom of God with urgency and purpose.

Key Takeaways

- The kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and those who want to experience the fullness of God must be willing to pursue him with intensity and persistence.
- Distraction is one of the enemy's primary tools. When God speaks a word into your life, expect opposition to follow.
- John the Baptist's imprisonment reminds us that even deeply faithful people face seasons of confusion and doubt -- and that God's answer is to point us back to his faithfulness.
- The Roman system of bread and circus kept people passive by meeting surface needs and providing entertainment. The enemy uses similar tactics to keep believers spiritually inactive.
- There are no victories on the sidelines. Kingdom participation requires spiritual investment -- in prayer, in fasting, in the Word, and in one another.

Discussion Questions

OPENING

1. When you came to church today, what were you honestly expecting or hoping to get out of it? What does your answer reveal about your posture toward God right now?
2. The pastor described being surprised by the level of spiritual hunger he encountered in Los Angeles -- a place he expected to be resistant to God. Have you ever had your assumptions about a person or place completely overturned by what God was doing there? What did that teach you?

GOING DEEPER

1. In Matthew 11, John the Baptist sends messengers to Jesus asking whether he is truly the Messiah. John had baptized Jesus, heard the voice of God, and had been preaching about him -- yet from prison, he still had doubts. What does this tell us about the nature of doubt, and how should we respond when we find ourselves questioning God in the middle of a difficult season?
2. Jesus responds to John not by promising deliverance, but by pointing to the evidence of what God is already doing. How does that response challenge the way we typically want God to answer our prayers when we are struggling?
3. Matthew 11:12 says the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and the violent take it by force. What does it look like practically to "take it by force" in your daily life? What areas of your spiritual life require more fight than you have been giving?
4. The pastor described the Roman strategy of bread and circus as a system designed to keep people passive, entertained, and unquestioning. In what ways do you see this dynamic at work in your own life -- things that are not necessarily sinful but that keep you from going deeper with God?
5. The sermon mentions that when God speaks a specific word to someone, that person often spends the following week in a battle. Have you experienced this? What does it tell us about the relationship between spiritual breakthrough and spiritual warfare?
6. The pastor said, "Some of us are going to have to put down some things that we shouldn't be holding on to" -- naming bitterness, pride, animosity, and anger as examples. Is there something you have been holding onto that is limiting your spiritual growth? What would it look like to lay it down?

PERSONAL REFLECTION

1. The woman with the issue of blood in the Gospels pushed through a crowd just to touch the hem of Jesus's garment. On a scale of that kind of desperation to comfortable indifference, where would you honestly place yourself right now in your pursuit of God?
2. The pastor spoke about spiritual investment -- waking up early to pray, staying up a little later, reading the Word, praying with your family. What is one specific, practical investment you can commit to this week that you have been putting off?

Practical Applications

- **Identify your circus.** Take an honest inventory this week of what consumes your time and attention. Write down the top five things you spend your hours on outside of work and family. Pray over that list and ask God if anything needs to be reduced or removed.
- **Pray for someone else.** The sermon emphasized interceding for your community and family. Choose one person this week and commit to praying for them daily, even if only for a few minutes.
- **Fight for the word you received.** If God has spoken to you recently -- through a sermon, a conversation, or personal prayer -- write it down and revisit it daily. When opposition comes, treat it as confirmation that the word was real.
- **Do not wait to be ready.** The sermon challenged the tendency to hold back because we feel unprepared. Identify one way God has been prompting you to step out -- sharing a word, serving in a new area, reaching out to someone -- and take one step toward it this week.
- **Invest spiritually as a household.** If you have a family, identify one spiritual rhythm you can introduce or restore -- a mealtime prayer, a brief Scripture reading before bed, or a weekly check-in about what God is doing in each person's life.

Closing Prayer Points

- Pray for a spirit of hunger and expectation to replace complacency in your personal life.
- Pray for discernment to recognize the distractions the enemy uses to keep you from pursuing God.
- Pray for the courage to fight for what God has spoken, even when circumstances seem to contradict it.
- Pray for your community -- that God would do a work in your city the way he is doing a work in places you might least expect.

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