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## Nobody Paid Any Attention

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### Matthew 13:13-15

[Jesus said] *This is why I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand. With them indeed is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah which says:*

*'You shall indeed hear but never understand, and you shall indeed see but never perceive.*

*'For this people's heart has grown dull, and their ears are heavy of hearing, and their eyes they have closed, lest they should perceive with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and turn for me to heal them.'*

Nobody paid any attention to the trucks. After all, they came mostly at night, filling in the sunken and marshy property. It was just an un-used ditch, a waterway that never went anywhere. So, the trucks came and filled in that ditch. They said they were making it useful land once again. And, nobody paid any attention.

The company that sent those trucks paid good taxes. The company that sent those trucks employed a lot of people. The trucks obeyed the laws. The only noise to be heard was an occasional horn blaring at night, or the screech of brakes, or the rumble as the load was dropped. Nobody paid any attention.

Over the years thousands and thousands of tons of industrial waste was buried in that ditch, and nobody paid any attention. When it was full, somebody decided to use and develop that filled-in land.

It would be a beautiful community.

The streets would be straight and smooth.

The houses would be neat and tidy.  
 The neighborhood would be clean and safe.  
 It would be a great place in which to live,  
   - a great place to raise a family,  
     - a great place to live out one's golden years.  
 They knew if they built it,  
   - the people would come.  
 And, they did. Before long, the neighborhood was filled -  
   - with the sounds of children playing,  
     - with the voices of mothers calling their young ones in  
       for dinner,  
     - with the drone of lawnmowers as fathers kept  
       up their yards.  
 And, nobody paid any attention to what was buried down deep in the  
 ground.  
 But what was buried wouldn't stay buried. By 1970 those toxic  
 wastes had moved under ground like vermin in the cellar.  
 They flowed and seeped and ran.  
   They fermented and bubbled.  
     They brewed and percolated -  
       - up and up and up -  
         quite unseen by the people who lived there.  
 Eventually those poisons seeped out into the community - into  
 schools and homes, basements and playgrounds, across backyards and  
 under front porches.  
 Nobody paid any attention until it was too late - until after Love  
 Canal had become a place of disease and disappointment, despair and  
 desolation. And then, when it was too late for some, people wondered why  
 nobody had paid any attention.  
 They echoed the words of Jesus when they asked -  
   - didn't somebody hear what was happening,  
     - didn't anybody see what was going on;  
       - why didn't someone yell a warning of buried  
         danger?  
 But, nobody paid any attention.

Jesus knew what that was all about. He understood his audience. He knew the people were slow learners. He echoed the words of the Old Testament prophet, Isaiah, when he said:

*These people have ears, but they don't hear. They've got eyes, but they don't see. And what they do hear and see, they don't understand.*  
[Matthew 13:14]

His audience came for the show, but they didn't pay any attention to the message.

You know what that's all about, too. In this isolating and separating world, it seems like nobody pays any attention at all.

Nobody pays much attention to what parents carry into their homes and deposit at their children's feet by a thousand unguarded comments, and a thoroughly materialistic lifestyle.

Nobody pays much attention to the values they show to family and friends as they claw and fight their way for money and power and prestige.

Nobody pays much attention to the cacophony of noise that comes out of their television every day, or what spews out of their radios, or what pops-up on the Internet.

Nobody pays much attention to what the children are learning, or laughing at, or reaching for.

It sure seems like nobody pays much attention to the values that are being heard, and seen, and understood. But those values are seeping, unnoticed, into every home and school and church -

- values which might be slowly eating away at the moral fiber,
- values which might turn out to be as toxic
  - as the poisons buried just a few miles to the northwest of the very spot where you are sitting,
  - up there in Love Canal.

It seems like nobody pays much attention, but there are eyes watching, and ears hearing, and minds perceiving everything your life is teaching.

I remember a time back when my son was four years old. Even back then he was a big talker and had an inquiring mind. One day back then I was answering one of the multitude of questions he had put to me, when he interrupted me in mid-explanation. "Gee, dad," he said, "you're a genius! You know everything!"

He may know better now, but back then, he thought I was a genius. It was then that I realized somebody was paying attention to me.

A grade school was celebrating “hero week.” Every child was asked to come to school dressed as his or her hero.

The father figured his son would want to put on  
 his Jim Kelly football jersey,  
 or his Derrick Jeter baseball uniform,  
 or his Tiger Woods golf shirt.

After all, dad had spent a lot of money to outfit his son in the boy’s favorite sports hero apparel.

But when the boy came down for breakfast, he was dressed like he was going to church on Easter Sunday morning. He had on a pair of dress slacks, a white shirt with necktie, and a sports coat.

“What are you wearing?” dad asked. “You’re not dressed like your hero.”

“Oh, yes I am,” the boy said, “I’m dressed like you.”

You may think nobody’s paying much attention to you, but the truth is, somebody is.

Somebody is watching you,  
 and listening to you,  
 and learning from you.

At some time in your life, you have been somebody’s hero. Somebody thinks you’re a genius. Somebody thinks you’ve got all the answers.

Out there somewhere, somebody is watching you. It might be a son or a daughter, a niece or a nephew, a grandchild or a neighbor, a co-worker or a friend. Somebody is putting together a life-style and a personality according to you. It is undoubtedly true, at least one somebody or two is watching and learning about life from you.

All along you thought nobody was paying any attention. You thought you could go on with living your life without having to worry about the consequences or the fall out. You thought you were doing it all alone. But, somebody has cut out a blueprint for life that was drawn on the pattern of you.

You think nobody pays any attention to you? Well, somebody is copying and constructing a life based on the way you live, on the way you talk and act and react, especially in your unguarded moments.

Over the years I had them under my roof, my children learned a lot from me. But most of what they learned from me did not come from the time I spent in the pulpit. It didn't come when I was precisely explaining some rule or courtesy. It didn't come when I was at my best.

Most of what they learned from me came from those unguarded moments,

- those times when I thought nobody was paying attention,
- those days when I was not playing at the top of my game.

You think nobody pays any attention to you? Well, somebody is listening and watching to find out what you're going to do with Jesus Christ.

Do you remember back when Jesus was on trial, and he was standing before Pilate? Pilate gave the people a choice: Jesus or Barabbas. Remember that? The people chose Barabbas.

Then, Pilate asked the most important question any mortal man can ever ask. He asked, "**Then what shall I do with Jesus...?**" [Matthew 27:22]

That's the question for you. What are you going to do with Jesus? Somebody's watching to see what you do.

You know what happened to Jesus right after Pilate asked that question, don't you? The soldiers came and took him away. And the first thing they did to Jesus was crown him. They put a crown on his head. It was a fake crown, a mocking crown, a crown of thorns. [Matthew 27:29] They pushed it down on his head and made him bleed. They laughed at him.

When Matthew wrote his gospel, he asked a question; then, he provided the answer.

The question was asked by Pilate, "What shall I do with Jesus?"

The soldiers provided the answer: take him out and stick a crown on his head.

It's what you do. The only thing up for grabs is the kind of crown you put on his head. Somebody's paying attention, waiting to see what kind of crown you put on Jesus.

Will it be a crown of beauty and reverence, a symbol of your obedience and love?

Will it be a crown of mocking laughter, of bitter jealousy, of cruel spitefulness?

Will it be a crown of indifference, of nonchalance, of ignorance?

Which will it be?

The son of a poor widow went off to Texas to seek his fortune. Like Condaleeze Rice, he stuck it rich in the oil business. For Mother's Day, he wanted to show his love and appreciation to his poor mother with a very expensive and unusual gift.

He called up a pet shop and asked, "What's your most unusual and expensive pet?" The owner said, "I've got a myna bird that costs \$27,000.00. It's the only bird in the world that can recite the Lord's Prayer, the 23rd Psalm, and the 13th Chapter of First Corinthians."

"Great," the son said, "I'll take it. Mom will love it. It will mean so much to her to hear it repeat Scripture."

So, he bought the bird and had it delivered to his mother the next day. Two days later, on Mother's Day, he called his mother. "Did you get my bird?" he asked.

"Oh, yes," she said.

"How did you like it?"

"Oh, son," she exclaimed, "it was delicious!"

When it comes to myna birds and Jesus, ignorance is no excuse.

It's like when you're driving on the 290 and the state patrol pulls you over. He clocked you going 70 miles per hour. It doesn't do you any good to claim that you didn't know the speed limit was only 55. Ignorance is no excuse.

And when it comes to what you do with Jesus, like that pesky patrolman parked beside the underpass, somebody's paying attention to what you're doing.

Pay attention to the kind of crown you put on his head, because somebody's watching you.

Do you love your enemies -

- even the people you just don't like?

Do you forgive seventy times seven -

- even those disgusting people who cross your path?

Do you pick up your personal cross and follow Jesus - even when that means you have to courageously

- confront death and despair,
- and bear illnesses and pain,
- and buck-up under disappointments,
- and rally 'round the rough days?

Or, do you mock Jesus with an outward show of allegiance while inwardly nurturing bitterness, or selfishness, or hatefulness?

What kind of crown are you putting on Jesus? Somebody is paying attention to your actions.

- If you took a good, honest look at yourself,
- if you really paid attention to how you're living,
- if you really understood what you're doing with Jesus -
- what would you see?

What would you hear?

What would you understand  
- about you?

You all have heard of Socrates, haven't you? You've heard that name. You probably studied something about him in school. Do you know he never wrote a thing? He wrote nothing: no books, no articles, no philosophical tracts. He left nothing behind from his life's work.

So how come you know about him, and remember Socrates as a great philosopher, as the author of the Socratic method? How come?

Well, Socrates was the teacher of Plato. Plato was the teacher of Aristotle. Aristotle was the teacher of Alexander the Great. You only know Socrates through Plato and Aristotle and Alexander. They wrote down and passed on what Socrates knew, and thought, and taught. Without their testimony, you would never have known Socrates.

Do you still think nobody's paying much attention to you?

You don't have to be a great man or a great woman of history. Books don't have to be written about your vast knowledge, or your succinct insight, or your creative wisdom. Because you are, just the way you are, a great man or a great woman in somebody's life.

Somebody's paying close attention to you. You are setting an example for somebody. You are teaching somebody. Somebody is going to learn how to crown Jesus, for better or worse, by imitating you.

You are shaping and molding the future that's going to be lived out in somebody else's life. In what direction are you influencing that person? What will he or she learn about Jesus from you?

Does your life tell somebody that Jesus is your Lord?

I don't know who wrote the following poem, but I like it.

*There's a sweet old story translated for man,  
But written in the long, long ago -  
The Gospel of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John,  
Of Christ and his mission below.*

*Men read and admire the Gospel of Christ  
With its love so unfailing and true;  
But what do they say, and what do they think  
Of the Gospel "According to You"?*

*'Tis a wonderful story, that Gospel of love,  
As it shines in the Christ life divine;  
But, oh, that its truth might be told again  
In the story of your life and mine!*

*Unselfishness mirrors in every scene  
Love blossoms on every sod -  
And back from its vision, the heart comes to feel  
Of the wonderful goodness of God.*

*You are writing each day a letter to man;  
Take care that the writing is true.  
'Tis the only Gospel that some men will read -  
the Gospel "According to you."*

Wherever you go, whatever you do, there is always someone paying attention to you.