TITLE: What About Them?

TEXT: *John 21:18-23; Romans 14:1-4 Romans 14:12-22*

INTRODUCTION: The title of the message this morning is a question that most of us have asked from time to time in our life, What about them? What about him or what about her?

 As children we often got upset if we suspected that we where not getting the same deal as our siblings and friends. We where quick to shout, “Not fair!” Given time, we grow into adults, but that doesn’t necessarily mean we grow out of the tendency to resent the things that we suspect are unequal or unfair.

 Today we find millionaire ballplayers who want to re-negotiate their contracts if a new recruit reportedly signs a better one then they have.

 Prisoners often write letters of complaint about unequal treatment in their places of confinement.

 And should a man standing in line at an airport see someone cut into the line ahead of him, he often will voice his displeasure in a loud tone.

 All this is an attempt to look out for numero uno, number one, look out for self and protect self-interest.

 When I was in the grocery business, I heard this comment a lot. “But what about them”? “What about him or what about her”.

 Find two stock-boys messing around in the back room when they should have been working, and when one is confronted and possibly disciplined, they often asked the question, what about him? What are you going to do to him…

 Or a cashier who didn’t get the raise that she thought that she deserved and found out that a fellow cashier received a larger one then she did, would often say well, “what about her” to voice their feelings of unequal or unfair treatment.

Peter would have felt right at home in such company.

After Jesus had risen from the dead and before He ascends into heaven He has these words to speak to Peter…

**John 21:18 I tell you the truth, when you were younger you dressed yourself and went where you wanted; but when you are old you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go.”**

**19Jesus said this to indicate the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God. Then he said to him, “Follow me!”**

Jesus said to Peter: **when you are old you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go.” You will follow me!**

 Jesus was telling Peter how he would die! That just as Jesus was crucified on a cross so Peter would be crucified on across because of his faith in Christ.

 And that, in fact, is how Peter dies. When that time came Peter requested to be crucified up-side-down because he didn’t feel worthy to die in the exact same manner as his Lord.

 But after Jesus had told Peter how he was to die it is interesting to note Peter’s initial response…

**20Peter turned and saw that the disciple whom Jesus loved was following them. (This was the one who had leaned back against Jesus at the supper and had said, “Lord,** **who is going to betray you?”) 21When Peter saw him, he asked, “Lord, what about him?”**

So typical, not just of Peter, but a tendency that we all have….

 When we think we are not being treated fairly or equally we say; but what about them?

Two brothers get their hands caught in the cookie jar and the oldest may be spanked and before the sting of the last swat goes away he asks well what about him?

After all none of us like the thought of unequal treatment do we?

 So when Peter gets this, not so good news, of how he will one day die and he turns and sees John walking close behind, he says to Jesus: well what about him? What about John? How is he going to die?

**22Jesus answered, “If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you? You must follow me.” 23Because of this, the rumor spread among the brothers that this disciple would not die. But Jesus did not say that he would not die; he only said, “If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you?”**

Jesus had told Peter, rather emphatically, “**When you are old you will stretch out your hands, and others will direct you and take you where you don’t want to go”.**

 Peter then noticed John standing nearby and said, “What about him, Lord?”.

 Jesus was telling Peter that the future was not going to be pleasant for him, and Peter wanted to know if he was the only one who was going to have a hard time—particularly in comparison to John, who, as everybody knew, had a special relationship with the Lord.

 The answer Jesus gave was straight to the point: “**If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you?”**

 In simple language, that meant that what Jesus

decided to do with John was none of Peter’s business… John’s future was strictly between Jesus and John. In the same way, Peter’s future lay in Jesus’ hands and was therefore only of concern to Jesus and Peter. What Jesus had told Peter about his own future was all that Peter needed to know.

 Jesus told Peter, “You will follow me!”

 In light of the future that Peter was being called to live, he could not afford to allow any distractions from the fundamental and all consuming call to follow Jesus. That was what he had been challenged to do years earlier beside the lake when Jesus called him to be one of His disciples, and this call had not been rescinded or altered.

 Peter probably didn’t like the news that when he died it would be in the same manner that Jesus did..

 Peter saw all the horrendous pain and suffering that Jesus went through on the cross.

 And to now hear from Jesus that he would face the same kind of death when his time came wasn’t pleasant to hear…

 So Peter did what we so often do when we think that we are not being treated fairly or equally… He looks at someone else and says, what about them?

 When we say “what about them” we are not really all that concerned about them but are just voicing our concern of what we may see as unequal treatment of ourselves..

 When we say, “what about them” we most often actually mean “what about me”…. Why is this happening to me if it is not going to happen to them…

 Jesus cut right to the meat of the matter when He replied…

**If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you?”**

Jesus wasn’t saying that John would not have to face physical death, but was simply making the point that whatever happened to John it wasn’t really any of Peter’s concern.

Peter was responsible for his relationship and faithfulness to the Lord and John was responsible for his relationship and faithfulness to the Lord.

 God had a purpose and a plan for Peter’s life and God had a purpose and plan for John’s life.

 What God was going to do with John really wasn’t of any concern to Peter and what God was going to do with Peter wasn’t really of any concern to John..

Peter’s primary concern needed to simply be with what Jesus wanted and expected of him..

 How often do we fall into this same trap of being more concerned with what God may be doing with or within someone else then we are about with what God wants and has to do within us?

Well, I wish brother so and so or sister so and so would do this or that? Why does God let them get away with what they are doing when He wouldn’t allow me to get by with it?

Why is God pouring out so much blessing upon them and not pouring out the same measure of blessing upon me?

Why do I have to go through this trial or tribulation and they don’t? What about them Lord?

 In the first century the early Church had a problem that was developing within the relationship between believers that was caused by the eating of various foods.

 The Jewish believers had grown up with very strict food laws under the Law of Moses.. The Gentile believers didn’t have all these food laws in their upbringing….

 Jesus had taught that it wasn’t what went into a man, what we eat or drink, that makes us unclean, but it is what we allow into our heart and mind that can make us unclean….

 What we eat or drink Jesus points out passes through us and leaves the body…. What we take into our heart and mind, on the other hand, has a tendency to stay there and actually becomes a part of who and what we are….

 Yet there was a lot of criticism and judgment going on in the early Church among believers about eating or not eating certain foods…

 God, how come Brother John can eat steak and I can’t?

 Of if it is not right for me to eat pizza then it has to be wrong for him to eat pizza!

 And all this controversy over the eating of certain kinds of foods was bringing contention within the body of Christ so Paul deals with the subject in:

**Rom. 14:1 through Rom. 14:23 (NIV)
1Accept him whose faith is weak, without passing judgment on disputable matters. 2One man’s faith allows him to eat everything, but another man, whose faith is weak, eats only vegetables.**

**3The man who eats everything must not look down on him who does not, and the man who does not eat everything must not condemn the man who does, for God has accepted him. 4Who are you to judge someone else’s servant? To his own master he stands or falls. And he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand.**

Scripture admonishes us here first to….

**1Accept him whose faith is weak, without passing judgment on disputable matters.**

What are the disputable matters that Paul was referring to here?

 The issue that Paul was directly referring to was the eating of certain kinds of meat. Particularly meat that may have been offered as a sacrifice to an idol..

 Explain: Meat of animals whose blood was offered to idols in the gentile culture was often later sold in the meat market..

Paul points out that…

**2One man’s faith allows him to eat everything, but another man, whose faith is weak, eats only vegetables. 3The man who eats everything must not look down on him who does not, and the man who does not eat everything must not condemn the man who does, for God has accepted him.**

Disputable matters, I believe, are anything that the word of God doesn’t directly and specifically address.

 Things such as idolatry, sexual immorality, lying, cheating, coveting, slandering, gossiping are not disputable matters. The word of God clearly and plainly addresses such things…

There are a lot of things that, out of our religious zeal and piety, that we may call sin that are actually disputable matters because the Word of God doesn’t directly address them.

What clothes a person should wear to Church. Should a woman wear make-up. Should a man wear jewelry.

 Can a Christian go to a dance.

These are all disputable matters and what makes them disputable is that the Word of God doesn’t matter of factly address them

 Gods word doesn’t say, men, thou shall wear a three-piece suit to Church on Sunday.

Or Women, thou shall not wear slacks to Church.

Or Children, thou shall not bring a cheerio into the Church sanctuary.

Scripture tells us…

**1Accept him whose faith is weak, without passing judgment on disputable matters….**

**3The man who eats everything must not look down on him who does not, and the man who does not eat everything must not condemn the man who does, for God has accepted him.**

**4Who are you to judge someone else’s servant? To his own master he stands or falls. And he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand.**

I believe that we can have personal sins.. Have something that is potential sin to us but may not necessarily be sin to someone else.

EXAMPLE:

 Drinking alcohol for me is sin. When I was young I had a problem with it. After I was saved my alcohol consumption was one of the first things that God convicted me of.

Now does Scripture say anywhere “thou shall not drinketh any beverage that has started the fermenting process?

 No! Not at least anywhere that I have ever found.

So how can it be sin to me if Scripture doesn’t expressly forbid it?

 Because God, through His Holy Spirit has laid on my heart the conviction that for me it is wrong, probably because of my past tendency to abuse it and allow it to control my life.

 So for me to do it, it would be wrong. It would be sin.

Does that mean that drinking any alcoholic beverage is then sin for everyone because I feel that it would be sin for me? NO!

How can that be?

 God knows our heart. He knows us better then we know ourselves. He knows what will draw us closer to Him and He knows what will pull us away from Him. He knows what we can handle and He knows what will handle us.

 From my previous experience with alcohol I know that it has a tendency to handle me. I didn’t handle it.

 I don’t necessarily believe that there is sin in fermented drink in and of itself. I say that because the first miracle that Jesus performed was changing water into wine. (And it was wine not grape juice), but I do believe that fermented drink, a lot of times, can cause us to sin, especially when we over consume it.

But this, in my mind, is a disputable matter. Just because I personally have been convicted of it and believe it is wrong for me, I will not stand up here and say that it is wrong for everyone.

 What I will say is that each of us should be open to the Holy Spirit and what He has to say to us personally about such things..

 If He says that it is wrong for us, if He says that anything is wrong for us, then we should heed His guidance and depart from it.

HOWEVER!!! Even if God had never convicted me personally of drinking fermented drink I probably still wouldn’t do it today…

WHY?

Let me read on…

**Ro. 14:12So then, each of us will give an account of himself to God.**

**13Therefore let us stop passing judgment on one another. Instead, make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in your brother’s way.**

**14As one who is in the Lord Jesus, I am fully convinced that no food is unclean in itself. But if anyone regards something as unclean, then for him it is unclean. 15If your brother is distressed because of what you eat, you are no longer acting in love. Do not by your eating destroy your brother for whom Christ died. 16Do not allow what you consider good to be spoken of as evil. 17For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit, 18because anyone who serves Christ in this way is pleasing to God and approved by men.**

**19Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification. 20Do not destroy the work of God for the sake of food. All food is clean, but it is wrong for a man to eat anything that causes someone else to stumble. 21It is better not to eat meat or drink wine or to do anything else that will cause your brother to fall**.

**22So whatever you believe about these things keep between yourself and God. Blessed is the man who does not condemn himself by what he approves.**

 Here is the way that it works!

 I may not be convicted by God that something is wrong, so for me to do it, it would not be wrong in and of itself. But if I know that if I do it it would bother or hinder someone else’s conscience and possible cause them to stumble or fall in their walk and relationship with the Lord, then I am no longer acting in Christ’s love by doing something that might cause someone else to stumble or fall even though for me it may not be sin.

**15If your brother is distressed because of what you eat, you are no longer acting in love. Do not by your eating destroy your brother for whom Christ died.**

**All food is clean, but it is wrong for a man to eat anything that causes someone else to stumble. 21It is better not to eat meat or drink wine or to do anything else that will cause your brother to fall**.

In this sense and this sense only is it right for us to ask the question “Lord, what about them”?

 Lord, what about them? If I do this or do that or don’t do this or don’t do that what effect will it have on them?

This take’s the same question “ what about them” but changes it from self-focus, looking out for ourselves, to focusing on others for their benefit.

When we ask the question “what about them” what about him or what about her, do we ask it because we are primarily concerned about ourselves or do we ask it because we are primarily concerned about others?

**19Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification. 20Do not destroy the work of God for the sake of food** (or drink or anything else).

This morning, are you making every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification?

Trying to understand God’s ways of dealing with other people can be confusing. We may become disgruntled, but one thing will help. We should let Jesus do his job, which is to lead and guide us, and we should do ours, which is to follow Him.

 This morning, Are you allowing Jesus to do His job in your life? Are you allowing Him to lead? And are you doing what you have been called to do--- Simply follow His leading?

 When you ask the question, “what about them”, is it "the them" that you are most concerned about?