

October 29th, 2023 Sermon: Blasphemy 1

MEDITATE

Blasphemy is the placement of one's own desires and values at the center of the universe: "self-deification." Blasphemers assume false authority, fully rejecting the Creator-creature distinction.

According to author Shami Hadid, the sacredness that modern people once lent to religious belief is now redirected to political belief. The world has not been secularized, because people replace religion with politics and identity. The world has not been democratized, because everyone thinks of themselves as king. In the late 1800's, Frederick Nietzsche recognized this self-deification, as well as its problems.

"God is dead. God remains dead. And we have killed him... Must we not ourselves become gods simply to be worthy of it? ... How shall we, murderers of all murderers, console ourselves? That which was the holiest and mightiest of all that the world has yet possessed has bled to death under our knives. Who will wipe this blood off us? With what water could we purify ourselves?"

What do you think of this quote? How do people try to be the Creator?

EQUIP

Read Genesis 4:3-9. We don't know why Cain's offering was rejected. But God does not reject Cain himself or punish him. Rather, God asks: "If you do well, will you not be accepted?" Cain was given a chance to learn, grow, and try again. But out of his God-envy and self-deification, Cain blamed Abel out of his own insecurity and murdered him. Cain lived a "zero-sum game": one where everyone else has to lose for you to win. All self-deified people see people as rivals, tools, or obstacles. They cannot forgive or learn. **What are some examples of the zero-sum game?**

To blasphemers, grace is not a blessing. They do not want to be forgiven by the Creator, because it would show that they are creatures. This is why blasphemy is often an "unforgivable sin." In "coming up with our own goodness," we forget that "coming up with our own goodness" was the source of sin! We are enslaved by addictions and biases.

Blasphemers also exploit themselves. They do not have the power of God, yet they try to write their own story like a God. As the saying goes, “heavy is the head that wears the crown.” Byung-Chul Han describes this anxiety well in his book, *The Burnout Society*.

In this society of compulsion, everyone carries a work camp inside. This labor camp is defined by the fact that one is simultaneously prisoner and guard, victim and perpetrator. One exploits oneself.

Have you experienced or observed this “auto-exploitation?”

Historian Yuval Noah Harari describes our blasphemous world in his book *Sapiens*.

“We are more powerful than ever before, but have very little idea what to do with all that power. Worse still, humans seem to be more irresponsible than ever. Self-made gods with only the laws of physics to keep us company, we are accountable to no one. We are consequently wreaking havoc on our fellow animals and on the surrounding ecosystem, seeking little more than our own comfort and amusement, yet never finding satisfaction. Is there anything more dangerous than dissatisfied and irresponsible gods who don’t know what they want?”

CULTIVATE

What happens when you don’t have control, when your freedom is limited, or when things don’t go your way?

Are you open to correction? Do you take responsibility for your actions, or do you pass blame? Do you know how to truly apologize without “if’s” or “but’s?”

Do you judge yourself and others? Are you burning out by trying to be the Creator?

Read Philippians 2:5-11. Jesus’ story is the opposite of blasphemy. Instead of deifying the self, he emptied himself of his divinity and entitlement in what theologians call the *kenosis*. Furthermore, instead of playing the blame game, he took the blame for our sins. We can repent of blasphemy by having the mind of Jesus.