

Weekly Study of Sunday's Message.

Sunday April 10, 2022. "Jesus cares about the least of these"

I Intro.

Welcome to the weekly devotional that gives you some specific things to work through from the message Sunday. Whether you were able to participate in this service or not, this devotion is free-standing and you can still use it to help you dig deeper into your own spiritual walk. We're now well in 2022 and we've got some big things planned. A great group of familiar and new faces join us each Sunday. Our children's area is expanding and we are retooling our student ministry. We also have many ways you can plug into life at NCC. You can check all that out through our newly upgraded app, and social media sites. We're so encouraged by your love and presence when you gather with us. If you're still joining us online, we love and so appreciate your presence also. We are 100% committed to our virtual attenders. We are your church family, and if there is ANYTHING you need, prayer, ideas or suggestions, please pass them our way. We know the future is still uncertain, but we are committed to making our virtual congregation as central to NCC as our in person group.

II Sunday.

I want to first thank Angela Barnett for filling in last Sunday. She always brings such a great word, and so much of herself when she preaches. She opened our short series on the way to Easter, "*What Jesus cares about*". We have been intently focused on the person and teachings of Jesus to help us align our hearts, minds, spirits, and all of who we are, as we move through the world. So, let's start thinking about our understanding and relationship to Jesus, and what we see he cared about.

What is your understanding of Jesus the historical figure?

What does your relationship with Jesus mean to you?

From what you know, what are things Jesus cared about?

Our scripture is a story we see in all four of the gospels. They're all slightly different, giving us a uniquely different perspective on this story. Read **Matthew 21:12-15**, then we'll do a deep dive.

What jumped out to you about this passage?

Really dig down into Jesus' reaction. What do you think he felt?

Tough question; Was Jesus' reaction appropriate? Why or why not?

Today the specific thing Jesus cared about is the least of these. A little background on who these moneychangers and those selling doves were. When a devoted Jew visited the temple, they were to bring an offering, (churches always love a good offering), and an animal sacrifice. Because so many people traveled from far away to visit the temple, they couldn't bring an animal for a sacrifice and they possibly had a currency from their home country that needed to be exchanged. So, what began as a service to help travelers obtain the proper currency and an animal to sacrifice, soon became a crooked scam that overcharged and cheated poor people. And additionally created a barrier that kept people from coming to the temple. Obviously Jesus wasn't having any of it. A couple of questions.

What can you tell from the reaction of Jesus that made this such a big issue?

Have you seen or experienced churches creating barriers like this now?

What did Jesus care about? If these are important, how can we make space for them in our lives?

1. Gathering as a community of faith. Jesus regularly went to the temple, even when he was a little kid. Even though Jesus was replacing the old system with this new, (actually returning to its original purpose of knowing God, and treating others), there was an **emphasis on the importance of regularly gathering with other believers and seekers**. The goal is to find people who can pour into you, and you can pour into others, for the purpose of spiritual growth. Jesus was raised a good Jew, and that was his regular practice. This was centered on a commitment to gathering at the synagogue. A house of prayer...for all nations to find God. Jesus seemed to prioritize, value, the communal coming together to pray, (not just the specific act alone), but the gathering in the presence of God. **Where are those intentional places where there are people who are pouring into you, and you are pouring into them?**

2. Worship leads you to honestly examine your relationships with others. *"Den of thieves"*, meant people who were taking advantage of others, treating others horribly, and then gathering in the temple didn't convict them of mistreating others. Jesus was addressing our tendency to treat people awful out in the world. Then come to church on Sunday, and there is no remorse or regret when we encounter God. This is why God said; *"if you have an unresolved issue with someone else, BEFORE you take communion, participate in the sacredness of worship, give your praise, leave and go work things out with them."* Our time in corporate worship, communially experiencing time with God, has to change how we interact, and treat all people out in the world. **What can you specifically work into each Sunday of gathering to worship that would help you reflect on your relationships with others?**

3. Growing your heart to see others as God sees them. The phrase *"den of thieves"* comes from Isaiah, and Jeremiah 7, and is pretty specific about what the synagogue should be. Worship time spent with God must continually **grow your love for all others**. This is what God meant when he talked about justice. We should leave worship with a bigger heart towards people far from God. If not, Jeremiah talked about doing *"spring cleaning"*, (what Jesus did in the temple), of things that don't reflect this call to grow in our love and compassion for others. **What habits and practices can you work into your daily life to make sure your worship in the house of prayer leads you to grow in your love for others?**

4. Actively overturning unjust systems that take advantage of the vulnerable. Jesus was mad because those who claimed to know God were as bad as the people in the world who had no faith. They were taking advantage of others in a way that held them down. God has always favored the poor, marginalized, and those that are pushed to the edges of society. God loves all people equally, but desires a society that cares for those who struggle to care for themselves. We practice this favoritism as parents. If you have more than one child, there will be one child you give a little bit more attention to because you know they need it. God directly commands his followers to give extra attention to those who don't benefit from systems and structures that are designed to create 'haves' and 'have nots'. Want to get on God's good side...stand with, speak out for, fight for those that society doesn't include or take advantage of. We are to do all we can to make sure that people receive equal treatment and that we stand with and protect people that society is not taking care of. **Where can you place or position yourself to stand with, speak out for, and fight for people who are at the mercy of unjust systems and institutions?**

III Challenge.

What Jesus cared about was **free, unfettered, access to God. No barriers.**

1. We have to knock down artificial barriers we put into place that exclude or block people from having full access, a path, to God. Soon after Jesus had ascended, the disciples were trying to figure out how to do this new thing following Jesus. They met to talk about forcing people to do and understand certain things before they were included in these little house churches.

James the brother of Jesus said these words. This is what they decided.

Acts 15:19. “Let us not put barriers, make it difficult for people far from God to find him.”

If it was important to Jesus to create full access to God, then it became a guiding light for them.

2. We have to remember living in a way that allows us to exclude others, treat people poorly, and then come into a gathering, and worship, not thinking our relationship with God is utterly dependent on how we treat other people, is not true worship. And God wants no part of that.

Anything we place as a prerequisite or expectation that you had to do BEFORE you could enter into a pursuit or relationship with God, was something Jesus hated.

What does Jesus care about?

Everything we do, say, are a part of, has to always be seen and felt as welcoming and inviting. It has to make it easy for those who are far from God, don't know him, may not even care, or even if they're antagonistic, feel the freedom to take their own journey towards God. We have to continually be making paths to God. That was the constant ministry of Jesus, and the privilege of what we get to be about.

How can I help make it easier for people to know God?