

CANeeded – Jesus Paid it All
6/20/21
John 3:16-18 | Romans 5:8-10
Sunday AM

As a wrestler in HS, I possessed quite the drive to win – and somehow, I won often enough, that when I'd go to tournaments, I'd get seeded in one of the top-3 slots. At one particular tournament, I got seeded ahead of a guy whose coach thought his guy should've been seeded above me. As a result, all week, this coach ran his mouth in the local paper denigrating me to promote his wrestler. Well..., as fate would have it, we met in the semi-finals. As the match started, the other coach continued heckling me. Now, if you know anything about me (even then), that didn't sit well. As a result, I made it my mission not just to beat the kid, but to humiliate/hurt him (not one of my finer moments). As the match began, I took the kid down, put him on his back, then let him up (5 pts). Then I did it again (score 10-2 at the end of round 1). Now, that he was humiliated, I next performed a move I knew would pin/hurt him – and in the process, I might've broken his ribs. After the match, as the kid laid there writhing in pain, I pointed to the coach and made some smart remark – again... not one of my finer Jesus moments.

What happened? Christian or not, we're all capable of getting swept up in the moment and behaving in a way that seeks to call people out to shut them up and shut them down – to prove them wrong and to make them eat their words. We seek to **cancel** them.

If you're just joining us, we're in a series of lessons talking about how to live for Christ in a PC/PC/CC.

LBH – more than ever, we're living in the *age of perpetual offense* – where people feel justified to be quick to **judge**, quick to **criticize**, quick to **condemn**, quick to **rationalize**, and quick to **cancel** those who offends us, bother us, or just rub us the wrong way.

While lately it's been used to silence celebrities and politicians – now it's turned closer to home towards our colleagues, neighbors, friends, and even family members who've said/done something that's offended us or hurts our feelings – and now, we feel licensed to cast them aside and cut them off. It doesn't matter that we've done life together and loved each other thru thick/thin – things are different now... and we're not going to stand for this offense this time or ever again – leading people to cancel cherished relationships.

In today's climate, it doesn't have to be anything major. It could be as simple as – *I don't like the way she looked at me!* or *I didn't appreciate his attitude or tone*, or *He didn't like my Twitter/Facebook post!*

The age of perpetual offense – where too many people are on a continuous search to be offended.

In Luke 19, we find the story of Zacchaeus, a wee-little man who rubbed others the wrong way – that is until Jesus came along and met Z at the point of His need.

*Jesus entered Jericho and was passing thru. A man was there by the name of Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was wealthy. He wanted to see who Jesus was, but b/c he was short, he couldn't see over the crowd. So, he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore-fig tree to see him, since Jesus was coming that way. When Jesus reached the spot, he looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today." So, he came down at once and welcomed him gladly. All the people saw this and began to mutter, "He has gone to be the guest of a sinner." But Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, "Look, Lord! Here and now, I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount." Jesus said to him, "Today, salvation has come to this house, b/c this man, too, is a son of Abraham. **For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.**" Luke 19:1-10*

I find it interesting that this encounter w/ Z, is the last ministry event Jesus would have outside of Jerusalem before going to the cross.

To offer a bit of geography, Jericho is east/down from Jerusalem, where the Jordan River flows into the Dead Sea. It was a bustling city b/c it was the last official stop before a person would make the 16-mile trek up the dangerous road to Jerusalem. Even today, Jericho sits at a crossroads connecting north/south and east/west.

Zacchaeus was an unscrupulous tax collector, who not only sold out his people for the favor of Rome, but was obviously skimming off the top for his own comfort. Thus, Z didn't make too many Christmas card list.

Yet, Z's story is a remarkable story of grace reminding us of a critically important truth – ***Jesus didn't come to earth to cancel people, but to cancel sin.***

In light of this, today, I want us to learn from Jesus how to minister to people in a cancel culture.

I **LIVE** Eyes Open to Ministry Opportunities

I can assure you word traveled quickly that Jesus was again passing thru Jericho – and this time, Z wanted to catch a peak of this famous Rabbi. Little did he know he'd have a Divine appointment w/ the Savior.

When Jesus reached the spot, he looked up and said to him, “Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today.”

Uhh... what? You want to stay where?

As mentioned, ***Jesus was just passing thru.*** He was enroute to His execution – He was a man on a mission to seek/save the lost. Remember, Jesus had entered humanity for one purpose – to redeem the lost creation. And yet, ***what kind of Savior would He be if He didn't live His mission of redeeming love all along the way.***

Think of yourselves the way Jesus thought of Himself. He had equal status w/ God but didn't think so much of Himself that He had to cling to the advantages of that status no matter what. Not at all. When the time came, He set aside the privileges of deity and took on the status of a slave, by becoming human! Having become human, he stayed human. It was an incredibly humbling process. He didn't claim special privileges. Instead, He lived a selfless, obedient life and then died a selfless, obedient death – and the worst kind of death at that – a crucifixion. Philippians 2:5-8 (MSG)

Yes – Jesus had a rendezvous w/ an old rugged cross, but not until He'd taken the time to meet Z at the point of His need. He saw Z! He saw his heart! He saw his intrigue! Most importantly, ***He saw his need!*** So, Jesus, seeing the opportunity, ministered to this socialite outcast – changing his eternity/earthly life.

We can walk thru life only focused on ourselves and purpose, or we can walk thru life w/ eyes wide open to Divine opportunities where God wants to use us to meet someone at the point of their need for His glory.

II **LOVE** the Sinner not the Sin

When Jesus reached the spot, he looked up and said to him, “Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today.” So, he came down at once and welcomed him gladly.

Remember, Z was a tax collector – meaning he was a compromised cheat/thief. He was despised by the people of Jericho more than even the Romans. Jesus knew this right off the bat! He knew who Z was, what he'd done, and why he was doing it! He also knew the condition of Z's heart and his need for God's love – so, Jesus chose to love Z in spite of his sin. *Jesus showed us that we can hate the sin but love the sinner.*

LBH – that’s easier said than done. And while I’m not perfect at doing this, I can tell you there’s a clear Biblical teaching to help us live this out. It’s the lesson of **condemning** and **condoning** – being too harsh or being too lenient. Jesus was neither – He was just right.

For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world thru Him. Whoever believes in Him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already b/c they have not believed in the name of God’s one and only Son. John 3:16-18

Notice – Jesus entered into our world to rescue us from sin – not to **condone** it or to **condemn** us. Our sin that we condone is what nailed Jesus to the cross, but it’s our sin/unbelief that condemns us – not God.

Listen – God hates sin but loves the sinner.

God demonstrates His love for us in this way – while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Romans 5:8

In him we have redemption thru his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance w/ the riches of God’s grace that He lavished on us. Ephesians 1:7-8

Thru-out the Gospels we find Jesus expressing this kind of love while possessing a holy hatred for sin. Whether it was the woman caught in adultery or the woman at the well, or someone else – Jesus is found extending grace, while never condoning sin.

Why? B/c **God hates sin for what sin does to us**. Sin separates us from God and others. Sin kills, steals, and destroys. As such, it’s impossible for a loving, holy God to ever condone, approve, or turn a blind eye to sin b/c of what sin does to us in this life as well as in the life to come. Yet neither does He condemn us.

One more thing – I want you to notice in engaging sinful people, Jesus never sinned in order to deal w/ the sinful – He did NOT participate in their ways.

I share this b/c on more than one occasion, I’ve met people who’ve attempted to justify their sinful actions and lifestyles for the sake of ministry. **BTW** – this applies to the condoners/condemners. To those too far right and those too far left. For the rebellious and for the religious.

Listen – sinning alongside of the sinful isn’t the means to help the sinful find grace/forgiveness. In fact, it’s just the opposite. Sinning w/ the sinful affords the idea that *if you can be okay w/ God doing what you’re doing, then I can be okay w/ God too*.

IOW – if I try to meet the sinner at the point of their sin by sinning w/ them, it’s more likely to take them farther from God, and plunge them deeper into sin, than it’s likely to help them find God’s grace.

On the flip side, we also see that the response of the smug, self-righteous crowd was incorrect too. The crowd wanted to condemn Z (and any other persons who didn’t meet their standards). This is the way of the Pharisee – and it too drives people away from God.

So, what do we do? How do we respond?

III **LISTEN** to the Spirit and not the Crowd

All the people saw this and began to mutter, “He has gone to be the guest of a sinner.”

FACT – at the crossroads of ministry engagement is a decision – *will I love/engage as Jesus did?* Or will I choose a way that seems right to me? Will I meet people at the point of their need or at the point of my standards/expectations?

YES – this will be a challenge. Let's face it... other people believe/do things we don't like or agree w/ and we believe/do things they don't like or agree w/ – and this creates a great divide. And, to top it off – we're always right and they're always wrong. Right?

I think in this encounter, Jesus teaches us a delicate and difficult lesson about G.C. ministry in a lost world. **All ministry engagement requires the leading of the H.S. and not the approval of people.** Why?

Not only are the lost running from God/Truth, but the religious can easily become so entrenched in their beliefs that they isolate themselves from ministry.

What if, instead of railing against culture – and digging in to fight for our rights (or what we perceive to be right), Jesus is showing us that the best way to stand for truth is to minister to people at the point of their need. To get out of our holy huddles and into the highways/byways of life w/ a genuine love for people.

Listen – I'm not saying that Christians are to cower or turn a blind eye to truth. I'm not saying we're to roll over and play dead. *Just the opposite* – we must engage. Only our tactics must be to fight w/ the love/grace of Jesus just as Jesus did – striving to meet people at the point of their need. Instead of being combative, be ministry-hearted/more concerned for the person than for the issue that's dividing. It doesn't always work, but that's where we should be starting.

No... this won't in any way be easy. Nor will it be popular among the self-righteous, but it is the way Jesus showed us how to engage for the sake of the Gospel. Likewise, it doesn't guarantee that the Z's of the world are going to be receptive. But they're more likely to receive the truth thru grace than thru hostility.

To me, this is one of the issues that just came out of the recent SBC. One side said the convention is becoming too liberal and too soft on sin, while the other side was saying we're becoming too Pharisaical and too harsh w/ the sinner. The truth is, Satan doesn't care if we go too far left or too far right – just don't walk the narrow road. Here's the thing – the narrow road is a road of grace/mercy. It neither condones sin nor does it condemn the sinner.

To distinguish the difference requires a life tuned to the H.S. and not to crowds – or else we might find ourselves going too far one way or the other.

Which brings us to – how we do it...

IV — **LEAD** w/ Jesus' Heart and Mission

For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost

Luke 19:10 speaks to both the mission/motive of God. Jesus became flesh for the purpose of rescuing you/me from the problem/penalty of sin. God did this b/c there was no other means or solution to solve our sin issue.

W/ regard to His motive – God's relentless love moved Him into action. God loves His creation and desires to have a relationship w/ all of us. He loves you! He loves me! He even loves the person you and I find unlovely. And it was this agape love that compelled Him to lay down His life to give us life.

Don't miss – when all else fails – it's God's love for us (and in us) that should compel us to have love and concern for others. Not to be their judge, jury, and executioner, but to be the hands, feet, and voice of God's love and grace to them.

So, **there you have it** – how to ministry in a CC (or any culture for that matter):

- Live eyes wide-open to ministry opportunities
- Love the sinner and hate the sin
- Get you cues from the H.S. and not the crowd
- Never lose sight of the mission/heart of Jesus

Back to my wrestling story. Shortly after the season, I went to a Christian concert at the Fox. When I get to my seat, guess who was sitting next to me? Yep...the kid I'd hurt trying to cancel his coach. I felt about this small! I'd hurt a fellow Jesus-follower. Do you know what he did? He shook my hand and gave me a pat on the back and wished me well. And when I asked him to forgive me... He neither condemned nor condoned – but forgave. He showed me how to behave as a Jesus follower even when others are trying to cancel you.