

Outsiders
It Starts in the Heart
October 21, 2018

PRE-SERVICE VIDEO

Overture – Heaven on Earth

Congregational Song – Sound of the Saints

Intro – Richard

**Congregational Song – Oceans / Awake My Soul
/ T&G (**

Video – Behind the Scenes

Feature – Heaven on Earth / Offering

Good morning everyone.

Before I begin the message, I need to update you on our Impact Partner offering which happened at the end of last Sunday's service.

If you were here or watched online you know that Shannon gave us an inspirational and informative

update concerning the eight partners we collectively support as a church; eight organizations in our local community who are laser-focused on doing some amazingly good things in ways that we cannot.

At the end of the service, we asked everyone to consider making a one-time gift of \$29.95 for each adult in their family to our Impact Partner Fund and many of you did that and we greatly appreciate it. But a lot of you weren't here, so you missed the opportunity. And just wanted you to know that there's still time to contribute and, in fact, a need.

Our goal on this offering is \$10,000 and at this point, we've received about \$6,900 so we have a little further to go. So, if you would like to contribute \$29.95 for each adult in your family (and we realize that might be a bit much for some and, at the same time, some could do a lot more) ... if you would like to contribute, stop by the

giving kiosk on your way out at the end of the service, or you can do it on the giving tab of our app or website.

As Shannon said, today we're beginning a brand new series called *Outsiders* and I should probably say right up front: *that is a bit of an odd title*. With the all tribalism that dominates the political and cultural landscape, thinking of and labeling people as “insiders” and “outsiders” seems like it would only add to the divisiveness.

These days ...

- If someone is an *insider* it means “because you believe what we believe, you are accepted. You're part of the inner circle. And you're my friend – even if I don't personally know you.”

- But if someone is an *outsider*, it means “because you believe something *different* from what we believe, you are rejected. You’re part of *them*. And you’re my enemy” ... which doesn’t necessarily mean “I have to kill you” or in some way try to ruin your life.

But it does mean that “you are not of my tribe, therefore you are not welcome. You and your thoughts and your hopes and your dreams do not matter to me – at least not as much as those who are *insiders* like me.”

You’re seeing this, right? You’re experiencing this on Facebook and Twitter and Instagram, right?

“You’re in” and “you’re out” and, therefore, “you’re a friend” and “you’re an enemy.”

A Different Meaning

Point being ... the word “outsiders” has some baggage attached to it so I hesitated to use it as the name of this series.

But I decided to go with it anyway, because, as it turns out, it’s also a very *biblical* word ... and, as we’ll see, in that context it carries a much different connotation. There’s a very different spin on it biblically compared to what it means culturally.

For example, the Apostle Paul writes ...

... and by the way, if you’re not familiar with Christianity, Paul is the guy who is almost singlehandedly responsible for the worldwide spread of the Christian faith in the first century. And what’s ironic about that is that he’s the last guy you would have expected that from because, as a young man, he spent years trying to *destroy* Christianity and Christians ...

... until the day the risen Jesus appeared to him face-to-face and said “I am appointing you to proclaim my name to the Gentiles.”ⁱ

And if you know anything at all about the Jewish culture in which Paul had been raised, you know that the Gentiles – everyone who is not Jewish; everyone not descended from the line of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob ... you know that the Gentiles were the ultimate spiritual outsiders.

Isn't that funny? The guy who was part of the ultimate insider group gets assigned to spread the message of Jesus to the ultimate outsiders.

Anyway, Paul writes:

Make it your ambition to lead a quiet life: You should mind your own business and work with your hands, just as we told you, so that your daily life may win the respect of outsiders ...
1 Thessalonians 4:11-12 (NIV)

Paul is saying, “We want people who are not part of our tribe (known as ‘Christian’) to think highly of us so we will do whatever it takes to win their respect” which, in this particular case, he defined as adding value to society by staying out of stupid conflicts (“mind your own business”) and being productive in some way (“work with your hands”).

In another place, he writes:

Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone. Colossians 4:5-6 (NIV)

“As we relate to those who are not of the tribe known as ‘Christian’,” Paul is saying, “let’s think before we speak. Let’s be gracious in our approach. Let’s say the kinds of things that make

people *thirsty* for what we have ... instead of making them *sick* of what we have.”

I don't know that Paul meant that last part. I just threw that in myself.

But do you feel the difference in how the word “outsider” is used?

People outside of the faith are not considered to be a part of the despised “them” and they are not considered enemies. Instead, outsiders are treasured. They are of great value. They matter.

In fact, in another letter, Paul illustrates just how valuable outsiders are:

*To those outside the [Mosaic] Law, I became as one outside the [Mosaic] Law that I might win those outside the [Mosaic] Law ... I have become all things to all people that by all means I might save some. 1
Corinthians 9:21-22 (ESV)*

In other words, “I did whatever I could do short of sin to relate to their customs and habits so that ... perhaps ... maybe ... one day ... *outsiders* to the faith, *outsiders* to our tribe would become *insiders*.” That’s what Paul means by winning them.

And that is so *opposite* of the thinking that predominates our political and cultural world these days; so different from the default mindset that says *outsiders ought to remain as outsiders* and, in fact, the *further out those outsiders are* the better!

For example:

- If you’re a conservative, the further out the liberals are, the better.
- And vice versa.
- If you’re a progressive female, the further out “old white men” are, the better.

- And vice versa.
- If you're a proponent of "due process", the further out those who say we should just "believe women" are, the better.
- And vice versa.
- If you believe in "open borders," the further out those who support "America First" are, the better.
- And vice versa.
- If you believe in respecting the flag, the further out those who "take a knee" are, the better.
- And vice versa.

And the list could go on and on. You see this, right? You're living this, right?

Not so in Christianity.

Not so in Christianity.

Let me say that again in case you missed it. *Not so in Christianity.*

- In Christianity, those who are outside of our tribe are not the enemy. Instead, they are treasured and valued. They matter.
- In Christianity, the hope isn't that outsiders will move further out. Instead, the hope is that *outsiders* might someday become *insiders*.

The Insiders' Purpose

In fact, in Christianity – and this might be surprising to you ...

The reason *insiders* even exist is so that *outsiders* can become *insiders*.

Actually, this was true long before Jesus came on to the scene and Christianity began. It goes all the way back to the days of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

In the very first book of the Hebrew Scriptures, in Genesis chapter 12, God comes to Abraham and his wife Sarah (who are childless and long past the point where children are even possible) and says “I’m going to make a great nation out of you. Sarah will become pregnant and one day your descendants will be as numerous as the stars in the sky and as dispersed as the dust of the earth.”

“But, Abe, I’m not doing this just for *your* benefit or theirs. I’m doing this because through you all the families of the earth will be blessed. By your descendants all the nations of the earth shall be blessed.”ⁱⁱ

That same commission was repeated to Abraham’s son Isaac and his son Jacob and then,

collectively, to the People of Israel. In the words of the Hebrew prophet Isaiah “you will be a light to the nations.”ⁱⁱⁱ

Point being ... God chose Abraham and the line of his descendants known as Israel to know Him and to be His people – to be “the insiders” – so that those who did not know Him would be able to know Him.

The insiders existed so that outsiders could become insiders.

Sadly, they did not fulfill that mission.

In fact, by the time Jesus came onto the scene a couple of millennia later, the insiders had narrowed the circle so much that many of the descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob were being excluded and shunned. They, like the Gentiles, were considered to be outsiders.

So when Jesus started hanging out with the tax collectors and prostitutes and other notorious sinners (people who were clearly on the outside), it rocked *everyone's* world.

The Gospel of Luke tells us in chapter 15 that ...

This made the Pharisees and teachers of religious law (the leadership of the insiders) complain that he was associating with such sinful people—even eating with them!
Luke 15:1-2 (NLT)

... which was a big deal in those days, because the custom was that only friends would eat together. In essence, Jesus was making a statement by his actions: “I like these people. These ‘sinners’ are my friends.”

So, one day, the religious establishment decided to call him on the carpet.

The Bible doesn't record how the confrontation began but, reading between the lines, it isn't hard to imagine that one of the leaders might have started the discussion by saying something like ...

“Jesus, how can someone like you – a great religious teacher, maybe even a prophet – be a friend to people like these? Even novices in our religious law understand that any form of contact with these outsiders – even a mundane activity such as sharing a meal together – will make a *clean* person *unclean*. What are you thinking?”

Maybe at that point someone else jumped in and added, “And we all know that God is interested only in those who live a good and moral life and observe the religious customs. But you – you're welcoming and including the very people who our religious system and even God Himself wants to exclude!”

Another might have added, “Jesus, surely

you're aware of the proverb that says 'there is joy in heaven over one sinner who is obliterated before God'."^{iv}

“You're giving these outsiders false hope and making yourself unclean in the process. Jesus, do you just not get it?”

Luke tells us that instead of responding directly to their question, Jesus (as He often did) told them a story; a parable – actually, three of them.

The first one went like this:

“If a man has a hundred sheep and one of them gets lost, what will he do? Won't he leave the ninety-nine others in the wilderness and go to search for the one that is lost until he finds it?”

And everyone listening knew the answer. “Of course he will!”

“And when he has found it, he will joyfully carry it home on his shoulders. When he arrives, he will call together his friends and neighbors, saying, ‘Rejoice with me because I have found my lost sheep.’”

And everyone listening knew that’s exactly what would happen because, in those days, most flocks weren’t owned by individuals. They belonged to entire communities. So, when a lost sheep was found that entire community rejoiced.

Then Jesus said ...

“In the same way, there is more joy in heaven over one lost sinner who repents and returns to God than over ninety-nine others who are righteous and haven’t strayed away!”

Luke 15:7 (NLT)

I think that Jesus might have paused to let the point sink in.

Then He continued,

"Or suppose a woman has ten valuable silver coins and loses one. Won't she light a lamp and look in every corner of the house and sweep every nook and cranny until she finds it?" Luke 15:8 (NLT)

Of course she would – especially if she was married.

In those days, most married women owned a headdress made up of ten silver coins linked together by a silver chain.

It served as kind of a second wedding ring. So, if the coin was from her headdress, there's no doubt what she would do.

Have you ever been around a woman who's lost a wedding ring or some other important piece of jewelry?

I have. Many years ago, Jetta lost her wedding ring. We were at the beach in North Carolina where my parents used to live and that's where she lost it.

I don't mean at *their house*. I mean literally *at the beach*.

Unfortunately, we didn't *realize* the ring was missing until later – in the early evening, so when we went back to look for it (and when I say “we” I mean the whole family), the place was totally deserted. All the landmarks – the umbrellas, the strange people – were gone.

Do you know what it's like to look at miles of vacant sand trying to figure out exactly which ten-foot square you had occupied? It's not easy.

But, eventually, we narrowed it down to a general area. We all got down on our hands and knees and literally began to sift every inch of that area by

hand.

Then it started to get dark. Not just because the sun was going down (which it was) but because a thunderstorm was moving in.

I'll never forget crawling around on the beach, the ocean pounding over here, lightening flashing over there, sea gulls circling over us. Eventually, it got to the point where I thought "this is too dangerous" but just as I was about to say "we really need to quit," someone called out, "Found it!"

We were overjoyed – Jetta to have her ring back ... and the rest of us to still be alive. 😊

Just kidding – we were all thrilled she had her ring back and we celebrated all the way home just like the woman in Jesus's story.

"And when she finds it," Jesus said,

“she will call in her friends and neighbors to rejoice with her because she has found her lost coin.” Luke 15:9 (NLT)

Then He concludes with the same point as He did in the first illustration.

*“In the same way, there is joy in the presence of God’s angels when even one sinner repents.”
Luke 15:10 (NLT)*

Now, I have a hunch that at this point, those who were listening were in shock because Jesus was in essence saying, “It’s not *Me* who doesn’t get it. It’s *you guys*.”

“In fact, you have everything backwards. The purpose of insiders isn’t to keep outsiders out. It’s so that outsiders can become *insiders*. That’s why Heaven doesn’t celebrate when sinners meet judgement and condemnation but when they repent and return to God!”

“You’ve got to get this straight, boys and girls: in the same way that lost things matter to people, lost people – people who are not of this tribe, people who are outsiders to the faith – matter to God.”

And friends, you and I need to get it straight, too. So, would you say that with me out loud?

In the same way that lost things matter to people, lost people matter to God.

To a shepherd it’s worth it to look for a lost sheep because that sheep is valuable to him. It matters.

To a woman who has lost a piece of jewelry, it’s worth it to tear up the house or sift a beach for it because that item is valuable to her. It matters.

And to God it’s worth it to pursue outsiders because they are as valuable to Him as any insider. His heart beats with love and passion and hope for

them. They matter to Him.

- That's why Jesus was doing what he was doing.
- That's why He treated tax collectors and prostitutes and other sinners the way He did.
- That's why He eventually allowed Himself to be crucified on a Roman cross.
- That's why He came to earth in the first place.

“It's not the healthy who need a doctor,” Jesus said, “but the sick. I did not come to call those who think of themselves as righteous but those who know they are sinners.”

Jesus - the ultimate insider - came so that outsiders could become insiders.

As the Apostle Paul once wrote:

God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners. Romans 5:8 (NLT)

Even when people *choose* to be on the outside, even when they are *against* Him, God loves and cares about them as much as He does those who are on the inside.

What's In Your Heart?

Here's the point: if you're a Christian ...

- If you believe that Jesus gave his life to atone for all of your sins – past, present and future – on the cross.
- And you believe that He rose from the dead on the third day after that.
- And because of that, you believe He is the One True Ruler of this Earth and this

universe

- And you are relating to Him and following Him as the Holy Spirit empowers you
- And you are part of the community called the Church

If you are a Christian ... you are among the “spiritual insiders” (so to speak).

And unless you are in a very unique situation or stage of life, you have friends and family, co-workers and acquaintances who are spiritual outsiders. They’re not part of the tribe known as “Christian.”

- They don’t believe in Jesus like you believe in Jesus.
- They don’t know Jesus like you know Jesus.
- They don’t follow Jesus like you try to follow Jesus.

- They don't participate in the community called The Church.

Now, here's the question (actually questions) of the day.

- Do you understand how much those persons matter to God?
- Do you realize that they are not the enemy? That, instead, they are greatly treasured and highly valued?
- Do you realize that God's will for your life isn't to draw you into an ever-shrinking "holy huddle" that pushes the outsiders in your life further out?
- That, instead, His will is that *through you* and *because of you* some of those outsiders might somehow, some way, someday become

insiders – believers in and followers of Jesus?

And I know that might be hard to imagine because some of those folks are skeptical, some are even hostile. They've mocked you and told you what an idiot you are for your faith. And now, your heart is wounded and maybe even bitter. It's closed off towards them.

Others *seem* to be open and even supportive. You've prayed for them and shared with them and invited them but there's never any positive response and you're discouraged. Your heart is tired.

Still others seem to have no interest at all in God. It's not even on the radar. And, so, your heart towards them is just indifferent. There's just nothing there.

Closed off, tired, indifferent. I get it because my

heart's been there, too. *But that doesn't change God's will for us.* As “insiders” we're still here so that outsiders can become insiders.

- So how do we restore the passion of God's heart to our heart?
- How do we rekindle the flame that says “all of these people matter to God, all of them are so dearly loved by Him that Jesus would come and give his life for them – so *they to matter to me, too?*”

See, in the weeks to come, we're going to talk about how to be better “insiders for outsiders”:

- We're going to learn how to explain our experience with God and how to explain the gospel
- We're going to learn what matters and what doesn't in sharing our faith

- We will discover how to be bold but gracious in the face of an intolerant culture
- We will understand how we can all help one another in this task

We're going to talk about how to be better "insiders for outsiders" but *this is where it always comes back to.*

**This is where it always begins: *in the heart;*
in your heart and in mine.**

And to address that issue, let's turn once again to the Apostle Paul who arguably had a pretty good handle on it.

To a group of Christians in the ancient city of Ephesus – believers in and followers of Jesus who were not of Hebrew lineage ...

... He wrote this:

Don't forget that you Gentiles used to

be outsiders. You were called “uncircumcised heathens” by the Jews, who were proud of their circumcision, even though it affected only their bodies and not their hearts.

Slide

In those days you were living apart from Christ. You were excluded from citizenship among the people of Israel, and you did not know the covenant promises God had made to them. You lived in this world without God and without hope.

Slide

But now you have been united with Christ Jesus. Once you were far away from God, but now you have been brought near to him through the blood of Christ.

Ephesians 2:11-13 (NLT)

Now, two things jump out at me in what Paul says

here; two things that are very helpful in keeping my heart soft towards the dearly-loved-by-God outsiders in my life.

1. Remembering that / was once an outsider

...

And that without someone whose heart was in tune with God's heart concerning outsiders; without someone who cared enough to invest a little bit of time in me and then invite me into the circle, I would still be an outsider.

As I've told you before, we didn't go to church all that often when I was a kid. For a couple of years we were fairly steady but, pretty much until I was 15, we just didn't have any connection to Christ and the church.

And when I think about what my life would be like today if some Christians who were in band with me at that time hadn't taken an interest in me, I can't even imagine it.

But I can describe it.

Actually, Paul does in this passage. He says I would be excluded and without God and without hope.

And when he says I would be without God, he doesn't just mean that I would lack some knowledge about God.^v He means that God would not be my God. And because he would not be my God, he would not be *for* me but *against* me; he would not be my gracious and merciful *justifier* but my righteous *judge* and condemner.

To put it in terms Paul uses elsewhere, I would be storing up wrath for myself on the day of the righteous judgment of God.^{vi} I would one day go away into “eternal punishment” as Jesus Himself once put it.^{vii}

And I would be without hope ... meaning that not only would I have no way of becoming an insider

even if I wanted to (because no one can ever atone for all of their sin) ...

- I would also have no way of making sense of the tragic nature of this world.
- I would have no confidence that my life could not only be better but that I could actually be better at life.
- I would have no reason to believe that whatever suffering I experience could be redeemed and used for my good.
- I would have no reason to think that there's more to this life than this life.
- I would have no meaning to my life beyond "eat, drink and be merry for tomorrow we die."
- I would have no guidance and direction

beyond whatever I came up with myself or whatever I heard from my political or cultural tribe.

- I would not have a sense of the presence and activity of the Holy Spirit.

And the list could go on and on.

In fact, it *should* go on and on because making that list helps me to remember that I was once an outsider and *could still be an outsider* if not for ...

- *Insiders* whose hearts were soft
- *Insiders* who understood that their calling wasn't to lock arms to keep people like me out
- *Insiders* believed that I was as valuable to God as they were.

Now, I know that some of you hearing that might say, "Well, Rick, I grew up in a Christian home. My

parents took me to church on the first Sunday after I was born! I was never an outsider.”

But you were. Until that day you believed in Jesus for yourself, you were living apart from Him. So you need to make a list, too.

So, that’s the first thing that helps keep my heart soft, and if you’re a Christian, I think it will help you as well. *Remembering that I was once an outsider and could still be, and exactly what that means.*

And the second thing that helps me is just the logical extension of the first:

2. Understanding what’s at stake for those who remain outsiders ...

... which is basically all the things that are true about where you would be if you were still an outsider.

Pretty much everything that you would put on your list applies to them.

And thinking about people in that way, realizing that they are without God and therefore without real hope both in this life and the next, that's what will melt a heart that is frozen solid.

Response

So, for those of us who are Christians, for those of us who are “insiders,” we're here so that outsiders can become insiders.

But so often that's a hard role to play. It's sometimes painful, sometimes aggravating and oftentimes discouraging. And it's easy for our hearts to become closed off, tired, and indifferent.

So, this morning, as we close here's what I want us

to do. We're not going to have any more music today, no closing comments or a blessing from me.

Instead we're going to have a few moments of silence and here's what I want you to do during that time.

1. Make a list of the “outsiders” in your life.

If you don't have a piece of paper, you can use the card that's in the seatback in front of you. Just write their first names.

Now, once you have some names, I want you to pray two things:

2. Pray that one day they would become an “insider” to the faith ...

That they would believe in Jesus and follow Him just like you do.

3. Pray that your heart would be like God's heart towards them ...

... that they would matter more and more to you like they do to Him.

Now, once you're finished with that, you are welcome to put your card in the basket on the way out. And this week, our staff will pray for the people whose first names you have written. And we will pray for you, too.

You don't have to give us your card, but we would love to do that for you if you will let us.

Finally, if you're sitting here this morning and you're thinking, "You know, Rick, I'm actually not an insider to this Jesus thing. I'm an outsider. But after listening to you, I think I'd rather be an insider" what you can do is to take that card and write your name and contact info on it and check the box that says "I'd like to know more about

following Jesus” and then put it in the basket. And someone will get in touch with you this week as well.

Ok, so here we go. A few minutes of silence. And then when you’re finished, you’re free to go.

Endnotes

ⁱ Acts 22:21 and many others

ⁱⁱ Genesis 12:3, 22:18, 26:4

ⁱⁱⁱ See Isaiah 58:8,10 and 60:3

^{iv} William Barclay, Communicator’s Commentary, Luke 15

^v From <https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/remember-that-you-were-hopeless>

^{vi} Romans 2:4, 5; Ephesians 2:3

^{vii} Matthew 25:46