

Outrageous!
Shocking Exclusion
April 12, 2015

PRELUDE – “Come Ye Sinners”
Worship Songs – “Come Ye Sinners” / “Who Is Like Our God?”
Announcements – Video

Feature – “Good People” / Offering

Good morning everyone.

As Shannon said, today we are continuing in our series, *Outrageous*, taking a look at some of the outrageous things that Jesus did and said. And we’re doing so because all too often the “Jesus” that people think of (and maybe even worship) is *not* the Jesus of the Bible. All too often the “Jesus” that people think of (when they do think of Jesus) is someone who looks and thinks and acts a lot like what conventional wisdom *assumes* a great spiritual and religious icon *should* look and think and act like.

Unfortunately, as you might expect, that causes a lot of people to reject the real Jesus. In some cases it also leads those who *do* accept Him to wind up promoting ideas and even creating institutions that are actually *in opposition* to what He did and said ... which then further propagates the problem.

So what I want to do in this series is kind of a wake-up call; sort of a symbolic (but loving!) cup of cold water in our faces that says, “Come on, snap out of it! Pay attention to what Jesus *really* said and to what Jesus *really* did.”

And, to accomplish that, over the next four weeks we’re going to focus on the words and deeds of Jesus that clearly do not fit within the paradigm that most people have when it comes to “God and religion and spiritual things.”

About The “Good People”

So let’s get into it. And let’s begin by talking about “the good people.”

When it comes to who God accepts and who God does not accept, the conventional wisdom is pretty simple: “Good people are in; bad people are not. Therefore do your best to be a good person.”

Ever heard that? Ever thought that? It’s a fairly common assumption that actually runs through almost every culture and every religion – not just Christianity.

One of my earliest memories having to do with God goes back to a woman who used to watch me and my sisters after school (I think I was in the third or fourth grade at the time). I remember her telling me –

after I had done something bad – “you need to be good because God is watching you.”

That made a pretty strong impression on me and the implication was clear: if I wasn't good – if I did not change my ways – I was going to be in trouble with God! “Be good because God is watching. Be good so that God will approve. Be good so that God will accept you.”

Of course, this is not a recent or modern idea. It was actually quite prevalent in Jesus' day as well. For instance, we read in Luke chapter 5 (which, by the way, if you are doing the 28 Day Bible Challenge with me, you read last week) ...

Jesus went out and saw a tax collector by the name of Levi sitting at his tax booth. “Follow me,” Jesus said to him, and Levi got up, left everything and followed him.

Then Levi held a great banquet for Jesus at his house, and a large crowd of tax collectors and others were eating with them.

But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law who belonged to their sect complained to his disciples, “Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?”

“Why is your leader hanging out with these kinds of people? Doesn't he know how it's supposed to work? *Bad people* are supposed to be shunned by God. *Good people* – like us, of course – are the ones he is supposed to welcome and receive. What does Jesus think he's doing?”

Apparently, they said this loudly enough that Jesus overheard them.

So ...

Jesus answered them, “It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.” Luke 5:27-32 (NIV)

I can imagine that caused a lot of consternation and head scratching. “The one who says that he is the Messiah – God in the flesh – isn't interested in *the good people*? He's interested in *the bad people*? Wow.”

Turns out that this was such a difficult concept for them to understand and accept that Jesus had to keep coming back to it. Over and over again in Luke's Gospel we read about the ongoing dialogue between him and the religious leaders concerning this issue.

For instance, in chapter 18, Luke tells us that ...

To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everyone else, Jesus told this parable:

“Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood by himself and prayed: ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other people—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.’

“But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, ‘God, have mercy on me, a sinner.’

Then Jesus commented:

“I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.”

Luke 18:10-14 (NIV)

By the way, Jesus’ comment about exalting and humbling is an interesting turn of phrase, especially if you read this week (in our 28 Day Bible Challenge) the passage from Luke chapter 2 where Joseph and Mary take Jesus to the Temple to be circumcised.

While they’re there, Luke says, they run into a priest by the name of Simeon. And after he sees the baby Jesus and realizes through the Holy Spirit that this is the long awaited Messiah – “the glory of the people of Israel and the light of revelation to the Gentile (or non-Jews)” is what Simeon calls him ...

Then Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, his mother: “This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel ...” Luke 2:23-34 (NIV)

“He is going to cause, on the one hand, the humbling of many who believe they ought to be exalted by God. And, on the other, he will cause the exaltation of many who have been told they are of little value and importance to God.”

In other words, Jesus is going to blow up the conventional wisdom about God and religion and spirituality so completely that up will be down and down will be up; first will be last and last will be first. Jesus is going to draw the line that defines who is in and who is out in a very different way from what most people believe.

Now, if you’ve been around North Heartland for a while or you have been part of an evangelical Christian church that teaches the Bible, I’m sure you have a sense of where this is going. You already understand at least one major implication of what Simeon said and then what Jesus later said and did in his ministry: *God welcomes sinners just as they are.*

So, your reaction to this likely isn’t the same as that of those first-century religious leaders. This news

would have come as a great shock to them, but you and I have heard that message so clearly and so often that it really doesn't have the same kind of impact for us. In fact, even people in our culture who are *not* Christians understand and even embrace this idea. That's why whenever they see believers acting in ways that they think are bigoted and judgmental, they'll bring it up.

"Jesus didn't judge or condemn," they say. "He accepts everyone just as they are. So, you must not be a very good Christian since you do not."

Whether or not those kinds of accusations are valid isn't really my point (at least not for today). My point is that most people already have a sense of the radical inclusiveness of Jesus.

But what most people *don't* have is a sense of ... well, let's go back and look very closely at what Jesus said in response to the religious leaders who were asking why he hung out with "sinners."

Remember?

Jesus answered them, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance." Luke 5:32 (NIV)

We tend to focus on the last part of that sentence: *Jesus came for sinners* – the last people you would expect to be "in." And that's worth celebrating and remembering and proclaiming.

But, because we're so caught up in this aspect of Jesus' ministry; so focused on his *inclusiveness*, we also tend to miss the other side of that coin: the shocking *exclusion* that precedes it.

Before Jesus said, "I have come to welcome sinners," he made it equally clear: "I am not interested in people who think of themselves as righteous. To those who believe they are 'the good people,' I have absolutely nothing to offer."

See, Jesus is not just "including sinners." He is *excluding* those who believe they are not.

And *that* was the real shock and offense to those religious leaders who first heard it. It was humiliating to them. "Excluded by someone claiming to be the Messiah? I don't think so," they said. "We're not going to take this."

And they did not ... which is why Jesus ended up hanging on a Roman cross.

Hard to Be a "Sinner"

But lest we become too quick to condemn *them*, the truth is you don't have to be a first-century Jewish religious leader to be offended by this exclusion.

Let me show you what I mean with a simple question:

When you think about yourself and the life you live, do you think of yourself as one of “the good people?”

If you’re like most folks, your answer is yes. Unless you’re a child molester or a rapist or a terrorist or someone who is into something really extreme, since the day you were born you’ve been conditioned by our culture to believe that you’re basically good; you’re pretty much OK. You’re OK and I’m OK. That’s how we roll.

Of course, most of us would admit that we’re not *perfect*. But then we would quickly add, “But I’m not all that bad, either. I’m certainly not a really bad *sinner*. Truth be told, and I don’t mean to brag when I say this, but if more people were like me, this world would be a lot better place to live. I’m one of the good guys. I’m one of the good gals.”

Now, with that realization in mind – that you might not say it out loud but you really *do* think of yourself as one of the good people – let’s listen to Jesus again. And this time, imagine him speaking directly to you and me this morning.

***“I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.”
Luke 5:32 (NIV)***

“I am not interested in those who think they are ‘the good people.’ I have absolutely nothing to offer them – to you.”

You have just been excluded. Jesus has just told you that you are on the wrong side of the line. Does that shock you? Does it offend you?

Want to know something even more offensive? The only way to change that – the only way to be accepted – is to do something that’s really crazy and humiliating: *you have to identify yourself with the bad people*. Though you may not have committed the same sins, you have to get on the same side of the line as the child molesters and rapists and terrorists and other despicable sinners.

That’s the point of the parable about the Pharisee and the tax collector. In God’s sight they were the same. Both were sinners – bad people – in their own way.

That’s why one commentator writes:

“To feel our sins and know our sickness is the beginning of real Christianity. To be aware of our corruption and abhor our own transgressions is the first symptom of spiritual health.”ⁱ

Oh, but that is so hard to do isn’t it? To feel our sins and know our sickness?

And I think there are several reasons why that's true.

1. We simply cannot see it.

A lot of us are like the guy who one day ran up to Jesus ...

... and fell on his knees before him. "Good teacher," he asked, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?"

"Why do you call me good?" Jesus answered. "No one is good—except God alone.

"You know the commandments: 'You shall not murder, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not steal, you shall not give false testimony, you shall not defraud, honor your father and mother.'"

"Teacher," he declared, "all these I have kept since I was a boy."

Mark writes that ...

Jesus looked at him and loved him.

I mean, this guy obviously was a very moral person. He had arranged his life in such a way that he was doing his best to honor God and I think that Jesus was impressed by that. He was moved by that.

But Jesus also knew that this guy wasn't seeing the reality of his condition. And he knew that in order for him to "inherit eternal life" he was going to have to deal with the reality that there was within him a fatal flaw that, as moral as he was, still put him on the "bad people" side of the line.

So Jesus answered ...

"One thing you lack," he said. "Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me."

At this the man's face fell. He went away sad, because he had great wealth.
Mark 10:21-22 (NIV)

Mark continues:

Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, "How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God!"

The disciples were amazed at his words. But Jesus said again, "Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God." Mark 10:23-25 (NIV)

Now, the reason the disciples were amazed by this ... the reason Jesus had to say it twice ... and the reason it was so hard for the rich guy ... is that, in Jewish theology of that time, being very wealthy was interpreted as a sign of God's approval. In other words, if you had a lot of money and possessions, that meant that God had placed his seal of approval on you. You were "in."

How shocking and offensive it was to learn that it was not the case! In just a handful of words, Jesus exposed the sin of idolatry – the love of money that took the place only God should have in this guy's life. Until that moment, he had never seen it. But when he turned and walked away from Jesus, it became very clear. He, too, in his own way, was a sinner. Though he thought of himself as righteous, it was clear he was on the sinner side of the line.

Sometimes, that kind of thing has to happen to us, too, especially if we're very moral people. God has to bring us into a situation that will expose the truth *about us to us*.

One way He did that for me was through my kids. I thought I was a pretty good guy – better than most quite frankly. But I discovered that I was unable to control my temper whenever those little bundles of joy would frustrate me (which is what kids do, naturally – it's a gift they have). I can remember coming to a point in my life when I was a younger man where I wondered if I was really a Christian because I was such a failure in this area.

And that was a good thing. It helped me to remember that I really am – in my nature – on that side of the line with the sick and the sinners. And I need Doctor Jesus to keep working on me until maybe one day I am well in that area.

Sometimes the reason it's hard to identify ourselves with "the bad people" is that we simply do not see our sin until something happens to reveal it.

But sometimes it's not that we don't see our sin. It's because ...

2. We do see it but we're too proud to admit it.

We don't want to be considered one of "them." We get offended when someone – like Jesus or a preacher – suggests that we are.

The Bible tells us that one day Jesus was addressing some of the people who had begun to follow him and who were starting to believe that he was maybe the Messiah. Wanting to encourage them ...

He said, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."

Sounds like a simple statement. "If you know the truth, then you will no longer be captive. You will be free." You would think the reaction would be, "Great sign me up, because I want to be free in every way

possible!”

But it wasn't. Listen to how they responded.

They answered him, "We are Abraham's descendants ... and we have never been slaves of anyone. How can you say that we shall be set free?" John 8:31-33 (NIV)

They were irritated and offended.

Now, here's what's incredible about their response: *The descendants of Abraham had been slaves many, many times throughout history. 400 years in Egypt; 70 years in Babylon; and repeatedly in their own homeland! In fact, at the time Jesus made the statement, they were slaves of the Romans. And it's quite likely that some of the soldiers of the occupation force were standing right next to them, listening to Jesus, making sure things didn't get out of hand, protecting the Pax Romana (the Peace of Rome).*

Now, these people were not stupid. They knew their history. They saw the Roman soldiers. They just didn't want to admit the truth about themselves because it would require them to humble themselves; to lay down their pride; to forsake their arrogance.

But then Jesus put his finger on the real problem they had:

Jesus replied, "Very truly I tell you, everyone who sins is a slave to sin ... if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed." John 8: 34,36 (NIV)

... which made them even angrier. In fact, by the end of the conversation, the Apostle John tells us that they picked up stones to stone Jesus but he got away – temporarily.

Their religious heritage was a big source of pride for them. After all they were the "chosen people." So, how dare anyone suggest they had any deficiencies! That they had any need to be set free from the captivity to sin!

And religious heritage is still a big deal for a lot of people today, too.

- **"I grew up in a good Christian home"**
- **"I've been a faithful Catholic or Jew or ..."**
- **"I've gone to church my whole life. I've given a lot of money."**

Some of us think because those things are true, we're the good guys or gals – and don't try to tell us we're not!

And some of us feel that way not because of a religious heritage but because of how we have raised kids in this culture over the past three or four decades. Even though the Bible – and our own experience – makes it clear that we are all "disordered" in some way (and that's what sin is – a disordered

relationship with God) we are so used to hearing "I'm ok, you're ok" ... we've been so relentlessly pumped up with a false sense of self-esteem ... that for anyone to suggest that we're doing anything "wrong" is an affront and a grievous offense.

So, it's hard to identify ourselves with the "bad people" because even though we can see it, we're too proud to admit it.

But there's one more reason we reject what Jesus is saying:

3. We see it and we admit it but we "horribilize and minimize."

And what I mean by that (horribilize and minimize) is very obvious in the story that Jesus told about the father with two adult sons (which, by the way, if you are doing the 28 Day Bible Challenge with me, you will get to read in the very near future).

You remember how it goes, right? The younger son comes to his dad and says "I want my share of the inheritance now" and so the father obliges. He gives half to the younger son and half to the older son. And the younger son takes the money, moves out and wastes it all on "wild living."

When he runs out of money, he gets a job taking care of pigs and he's so hungry that he occasionally eats some of what he's feeding them. Then it hits him: *it was a lot better at home. Maybe my father will take me back as a hired hand.*

So, he goes home and before he can finish his carefully rehearsed speech, his father runs to him, hugs him, kisses him, puts a robe and a ring on him and kills the fatted calf to celebrate his return.

"Meanwhile, the older son was in the field. When he came near the house, he heard music and dancing. So he called one of the servants and asked him what was going on. 'Your brother has come,' he replied, 'and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound.'

Jesus said ...

"The older brother became angry and refused to go in. So his father went out and pleaded with him. But he answered his father ...

And listen carefully to what he says:

"Look! All these years I've been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders. Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him!" Luke 15:25-30 (NIV)

Now, what is this older son doing? He's horribilizing his younger brother's sin while minimizing his own.

Wait, what sin did he commit, Rick?

- **For one, he wouldn't go in to the party which was an insult to his father.**
- **Two, his father had to come out and plead with him which, in that culture, was humiliating.**
- **And, three, he publicly accused his father of not even giving him a worthless goat when, in fact, his father had already given him his full inheritance! He was ungrateful.**

But far worse than those sins was the sin revealed by the fact that he saw his dad primarily as an employer (and a demanding one at that) instead of a gracious father, and that he thought of himself as a slave instead of a son. For even though he had stayed home in his body, *in his heart he had been as far away from his father as his younger brother.* But because he had stayed at home, in his mind his sin was minimal while his brother's was horrible.

And of course, the reason Jesus told this story (if you read the context) was in response to yet another complaint by the religious leaders that he was hanging out with tax collectors and other sinners – welcoming them and even eating with them.

And his point was very clear: the sinners and tax collectors were the younger son and *they* were the older son. It was true that they had not strayed in the same way as their brothers (and sisters). But they *had* strayed. They were obeying God out of duty and drudgery and not love. And Jesus cut right through their minimizing and horribilizing strategy to reveal the truth.

And, oh my, don't you and I do the same exact thing? We tell ourselves we're the good guys because we don't do this horrible thing or that horrible thing but, deep down on the inside, so often we are angry with God. So often we feel like God is a demanding taskmaster for whom we are slaving away without any reward. And we don't run wild like our younger brothers and sisters because somebody's got to be responsible. But, in our hearts, that's where we want to be. That's where we would be, if things were different.

It's so very hard to believe Jesus would exclude you when you not only believe you're one of the good people – you're actually *not* a child molester or a rapist or a terrorist. When you strive to make positive contributions to society it's so very hard to think that Jesus would exclude you. It's shocking and it's downright offensive.

But that's what He says.

- **I have not come for the people who think they are righteous.**

- I have not come for the people who think that they're already good enough.
- I've not come for those who believe their shortcomings and failures aren't as bad as everyone else's.

"If that's what you believe about yourself," Jesus is saying, "then with respect to the Kingdom of God, what God is doing and God is planning to do, you're on the outside."

Implications

Now, to be completely honest with you, I really do not like that I had to give this message. I don't like it because it once again forces me to look at my own heart and life and admit things I'd rather not.

And I don't like it because I know it causes tension in some of you who are either new to this experience or who have been around a long time but just have never understood it. And I'm afraid you're going to go running into the streets when we open these doors and you'll never come back.

So, I'm very tempted at this point to brush it all aside and run to the final solution ... which is *grace*. But I don't think that's wise because unless we understand what sin is and what our own sinful nature and behavior is like, we will never appreciate grace for what it is.

So, what I want to do as we draw this to a close is to share just two practical implications of this truth and talk about the grace side of things in the coming weeks.

Here's the first implication ... and I think it should be obvious.

1. The first step to "inclusion" is agreeing with God about our sinfulness.

As one of Jesus' best friends, the Apostle John, once wrote:

If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. 1 John 1:8-9 (NIV)

And, as I said, we'll get more into that in the next few weeks.

Here's the second implication – maybe not as obvious but just as huge.

2. The church is not a museum for saints; it's a hospital for sinners.

Talk about blowing up the conventional wisdom!

Most people believe church is for people who have it all figured out; people who have it all together in

their lives. And because they know *they* don't have it all together (even though they tell themselves they're part of "the good people") they don't come. They don't participate.

And that makes me sad because we are all still works in progress, no matter how long we've known Jesus. In fact, truth is, the longer I've known Jesus and the better I've gotten to know Him, the more I realize how much of a sinner I really am. And a lot of you can relate to that.

And, because of grace, we understand that's not a reason to beat ourselves up and think of ourselves as "miserable worms."

But it *is* a reason to be patient and understanding with others who have not yet come to the place of admitting they are sinners who need a savior. It *is* a reason to be compassionate and merciful to people who still struggle to overcome whatever sin has a hold on their lives. And it *is* a reason to keep reminding them and ourselves that in Christ, there is freedom and forgiveness and hope.

So let us never forget that when we come into the Church, we are entering the hospital for sinners. And it is a great place for all of us sinners to be.

Let's pray.

Feature – "Come As You Are" / Crowder

CLOSING COMMENTS

- 1. Next week – "A Stunning Invitation"**
- 2. Paving pushed back a week**
3. <pic> Continue the Bible challenge – get the app and catch up – 10 minutes a day for the next 21 days to know Jesus better.

Endnotes

ⁱ <https://www.crossway.org/blog/2015/03/reading-the-bible-with-dead-guys-j-c-ryle-on-mark-213-17/>