

The Rev. Charlie Holt:

Let us pray. Heavenly Father, thank You for the gift of Your Word, where You call us to look at people through Your eyes to see that every single person on this planet is sought after as the one who needs salvation. And so give us Your heart, Lord. Give us Your eyes to see people through Your eyes, and give us a desire and an urgency to seek out and reach out for the lost. We bless You and thank You for the preaching of Your Word. May it be Your Word for the sake and glory of Your Son Jesus, in His name we pray. Amen.

I don't usually post things on Facebook that are too controversial, usually just pictures of fish that I've caught or nature scenes, or pictures of my family.

So I was very moved, actually, by the ministry of Charlie Kirk.

I thought that he was doing something that was actually really, really good, going on to college campuses and interacting with people and trying to reach people, really, for the sake of the gospel. He was a Christian and a person that was trying to share his faith and communicate with people who didn't believe the same things that he did and share his faith. And then, you know, he had conservative political views, and he would contend with people over those conservative political views. But he was a person who was, and this is what I titled my post: he was the man in the arena, like Teddy Roosevelt's famous quote. You know, it's the man in the arena. He was somebody that was willing to get in there and actually do the work of a prophet or an evangelist and share his faith and put himself out there in a vulnerable way in a way that many of us are not willing to do. I mean, this is why we only post pictures of fish that we've caught or our kids, or nice things on Facebook. And I found out pretty quick why I only put fish pictures on my Facebook page because

people can be pretty ugly on social media.

Even with a horrific event as the assassination of Charlie Kirk, I was saying something nice

about him, and I realized that the politics just gets involved in everything. And fascinating that people who I thought were my friends, at least they were my Facebook friends, suddenly unfriended me and blocked me from because of what I had said.

And I don't think I'm the only one that that happened to this week, I'm sure, because a lot of people posted things either in support or against Charlie Kirk and his ministry. And I just think our gospel passage is really important for us today to really address the attitudes of our hearts towards the people of this world and to allow what Jesus is saying here to challenge us about the way that we think about one another and the way that we treat one another. Jesus was gathering a crowd like He always did, but in this particular crowd, there were identified tax collectors and sinners, and some people that are religious leaders, Pharisees, and scribes were there, and they noticed it.

And this is what they said. They grumbled as they were saying it. So these were grumpy people, angry people.

This man receives sinners and eats with them.

Now, a couple of observations about this scene.

Now, first of all, there was something about Jesus that He attracted people that were in bad categories.

Tax collectors were not people that people liked very much. I know we have an opinion about the IRS tax collectors. A lot of us have had experiences with them, and I've gotten on the phone with IRS people before, and sometimes they're really mean, and sometimes I've had some nice ones too. But these are not even that kind of tax collectors, IRS tax collectors. These are Jewish people who had, in a sense, gone to work for the Romans, who were the occupying power and were being utilized by the Romans to extort money from their own family members, okay?

In other words, there were a lot of good reasons to not like tax collectors.

And if people were a little judgy about tax collectors, it was very understandable.

And yet for some reason, Jesus was welcoming these, in a sense, bad people into His presence, and not just welcoming them into His presence, He was actually eating with them. He was sharing a meal with them and fellowshiping with them.

So here's a couple of observations about this. First of all, the Pharisees and the scribes they had labeled a group of people, and the label that they were using was the label "sinner."

And what's fascinating about this scene is the only person who wasn't a sinner in that gathering was Jesus, the one who was actually welcoming sinners.

What the testimony of the Scriptures is, and we had this from the Psalm that we just channeled and read, is that every single person on this planet is a sinner.

Do we all know that?

What the Psalmist says is the fool says in his heart, "There is no God."

What he's saying is it's not just verbal atheism that makes us foolish, but it's heart atheism.

It's when we are, in a sense, living our lives as if the worship of the Lord is not the most important thing.

And all of us do that, is what the Psalmist says. Every single person on this planet has times and occasions, and maybe more often than not, where we live as practical atheists as if God is irrelevant to our life or as if the Lord doesn't matter. And so, we go about the life and the way that we treat people, the way that we talk, the way that we do things, the way that we relate to things like money and stuff, or other idols.

And in a sense, we are being foolish.

And the judgment of the Psalmist is, "There is no one who is righteous, no, not one." Paul would actually pick up this Psalm in his letter to the Romans, where he basically is saying every single person, he's making the case in the first three chapters of Romans, every single person on this planet is in desperate need for Savior, every single one.

And he even points the finger at himself. He says, "Am I any better?"

No, not at all.

And the reading we had from 1 Timothy, you actually hear Paul's testimony. He says, "I was a blasphemer.

I was a person who persecuted the church of God. I was somebody who was violent."

And he was violent. He was a person that was approving the stoning of Stephen.

And he says, "Yet Jesus Christ came into this world to save sinners."

And then Paul says, "Of which I am the foremost.

I'm the worst one."

So you know, what we do with our labels when we say, "Well, here's the bad people. These are the deplorable people. These are the Nazis. These are the fascists. These are the communists. These are the leftists. These are the haters," or whatever it is.

And we categorize entire groups of people, and we say, "These are the bad people."

And of course, we're not including ourselves in that group of the bad people, are we?

But this is what Pharisaism and the scribes were doing. Not only were they wanting to write off that group of people, but they were also wanting to write off those who were associating themselves who were welcoming that group of people into their lives.

And particularly, they were disassociating themselves from Jesus because they wanted to disassociate themselves from other people.

And here's the thing.

Jesus wants to encourage us. And from his perspective, even the Pharisees and the scribes were not lost causes.

And again, to just pick up on Charlie Kirk just because of the relevance of this week,

one of the things that, whether you believed everything that he taught or any of that,

one of the things I have to give him incredibly high marks for was that he was willing to go to any place, any campus, and share his beliefs and his faith.

And he wanted to find the person that he could share it with that believed the opposite of him. That's the person he was seeking.

And so, he would put up his microphone in the midst of a big crowd, and then the crowd would come, and there'd be a lot of supporters there. And the first person he wanted up to the mic was always the person that disagreed with him the most.

When I went to the University of Florida, that blessed institution, which, please pray for the Gators. They just are really having a hard time in their football. They're just having a hard time. But we had a place called the Plaza of the Americas, and people would come out, and they were the evangelists, and many of them were very unwinsome in the way that they would ,À they were mal-evangelists, not preaching good news, but really just preaching

condemnation. And we had this guy, his name was Brother Jed, and Brother Jed would come out, and he would condemn all the college students.

And he would gather a big crowd because he was so loud, and it was really just kind of a show. And the college kids would come around, and they'd tease him and make fun of him and try to get him provoked and stirred up so he would condemn him even more.

And Brother Jed was a sideshow.

But he wasn't really interested in reaching those college kids. At least he didn't seem like it. He was more interested in condemning them.

And that is not what Jesus is encouraging us to do. He's encouraging us to be soul winners, to be people that want to engage with those who disagree with us, who don't believe the same things that we believe, not in order to condemn them or to judge them, but in order to show grace to them and mercy and the truth of God and the truth, and win them to Himself and reconcile the world to Himself through our ministry. That is the ministry of the church and the people of God, is to be the instruments of grace. And we don't do it from a posture of arrogance or ignorance. We need to take on the model of Paul, who says, "Hey, I'm a sinner. I'm just one beggar showing another beggar where the bread is.

Jesus Christ is the one that came into this world to save sinners," is what Paul said.

And so what Jesus is trying to do, even for the Pharisees, even for these judgey people, is to give them a different perspective on ways to look at people. And so He tells them these stories. You know, if you had a hundred sheep and you lost one, wouldn't you go and leave the 99 and go hunting for that one to get them back? And why would you do that? You know, that's the thing that He's trying to get us to see.

And when you found that sheep, wouldn't you call all your friends over and say, "Hey, remember that sheep I lost? I found it. Yay." Well, that's the way the rejoicing goes in heaven. He tells the story of the woman with the ten coins. If

you lost one, find it. To have your friends over, yay. That's the way it is in heaven. What's Jesus trying to get us to do?

Well, one is to have a desire for the lost.

Two, I got three D's. To have a desire for the lost.

Where we so much care about the lost sheep that we're willing to go anywhere, whether that's a college campus or into a neighborhood or to the club or wherever it is, into the park and seek out after the one who needs the Lord.

And that may be somebody that you might normally write off, but having a desire for the lost. Why?

Because every single one of those sheep, every single one of those coins is valuable.

They're worth saving.

And this is the way that the Lord looks at each and every one of us, each and every one of you and me and the rest of the people of this world.

He doesn't desire that anyone perishes, but that everyone would come to repentance. He wants to see people reconciled to himself. That's why Jesus Christ came into this world, to save sinners.

And so, have a diligent focus on the one.

Every soul matters. It's like the little boy on the shore where all the starfish have washed up on the beach. You know the story, and he's throwing the starfish out, throwing the starfish out. And this guy comes up and he says, "It doesn't seem like you're making very much of a difference with these millions of starfish up on the beach." And the little boy reaches down and he picks up one more, throws it into the ocean. He says, "I better make a difference for that one."

Every one that we can find matters.

And then, delighting in the found.

I go back to, you know, this sort of canceling each other and unfriending and blocking that we can do on social media. We are seeing a lot of that happening, but it doesn't just happen in social media. It's happening in society.

It's happening in life where we're unfriending, blocking, and just writing people off and canceling them out of our lives.

And thank God that God doesn't do that to us, that we're not lost causes to Him ever. He's always holding out hope as long as we have breath in our lungs.

And when one sinner repents and returns to the Lord, what the Scriptures say is there's incredible delight. There's like a party in heaven for the one that returns, just like if you had found that sheep or found that coin, you'd throw a party.

What the Lord is trying to get these Pharisees and scribes to do, these, Ä¶ they're judgey people, is to look at people through the eyes of God, to look at people through the heart of God, and to see every single person, even the most prickly people in our lives,

as potential people that might be reconciled to the Lord.