

Message Notes June 21st, 2020 – Beautiful Outlaw: Encountering the True Personality of Jesus
Week 2: The Playfulness of Jesus (Luke 24:13-35)

• **Is God Playful?**

- I have a serious question for you: *is God playful?* I know, that's an ironic sentence. But it's actually an important thing to consider. We don't have much trouble acknowledging the awesomeness, the holiness, the justice, the mercy, and the love of God. But why is it that some of us hesitate to think of God's playfulness? Is it because it's not *biblical* or is it because we've been led to neglect a significant aspect of God's personality?
 - It's important to think about because, if you read the Scriptures, *Joy* is serious business—Joy is a big part of our existence, of God's existence. If we know God's other characteristics, but we fail to acknowledge the joyful, exuberant, even playful personality of the Triune God, we will miss a key part of who God is and what God's ultimate purpose is for us.
 - Remember this is the God who created *all* things—yes, He made lightning and mountains and lions, but He also made flying squirrels and laughter and puppies. While creation is marred by sin and death, we can still see God's workmanship and glory in what has been made.
 - And Genesis 1 says that after God's work of creation was finished, He looked at everything with deep satisfaction and joy saying, "it was all *very good*," and declared a day of rest. The first day that Adam and Eve woke up to was a *rest day* with God, a day to simply enjoy all that had been made.
 - From the beginning, even before the Fall of humankind, work and rest and play were woven into the fabric of creation. Among its many purposes, creation was made as an abundant gift to *enjoy* from the Fountain of Joy and Delight Himself.
- Now, if you want to know what God is like, the best way to do that is to look at Jesus. It was Jesus who said to the Disciples, "If you've seen me, you have seen the Father," (John 14:9). Everything Jesus the Son said and did was in response to what God the Father was saying and doing (John 5:19). And Hebrews 1:3 says, "The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word."
 - Christians believe that Jesus is the clearest and most perfect revelation of God to the world, He is God incarnate, God in the flesh. And the Bible, the word of God, is what points to and reveals Jesus to us.
- So, as we return to Scripture with fresh eyes and open hearts to rediscover the wildness and wonder of this Beautiful Outlaw, this Glorious Savior, we are rediscovering who God is. And I would propose to you that in addition to all His other biblical attributes, *God is playful*—it's a delightfully refreshing truth that we all too easily forget.

• **The Road to Emmaus**

- Think about all the interactions Jesus had with others recorded in the Gospels, and all the signs and wonders he performed to point to the Kingdom of God. How often, if you're looking carefully, can you detect a twinkle in his eye, a playfulness, a whimsical touch? The water into wine, the miraculous catch of fish, the feeding of the 5,000. And you see this same playfulness in his interactions with his friends the disciples, especially after his resurrection: remember the story we looked at last week of him coming to his disciples as they tried to fish on the sea of Galilee?
- Let's look now at another post-resurrection appearance that's maybe even more interesting and whimsical, this story of the road to Emmaus from Luke 24.
- Now, I have always loved this story, and I have often pondered it through the lens of the disciples' grief and Jesus' mystery, but in reading John Eldredge's book, this was the first time I considered this story through the lens of the risen Christ's *playfulness*. He offers such a refreshing commentary on this classic story than I just want to quote the book at length here to help see the richness of this moment:
- The scene opens on the day of Jesus' resurrection, with two of his grief-stricken disciples making the 7-mile journey out of Jerusalem where all the chaos happened, to the village of Emmaus. As

they're walking along, Jesus walks up alongside them to ask what they're talking about—but somehow, his identity remains hidden from them, and he pretends to be a friendly stranger.

- John Eldredge writes, *"You have got to be kidding. Here are two of Jesus' disciples as grief-stricken as humans can be. They think he's dead. They think it's all over. If any moment cried out for good news from Jesus, it was this one. Yet again, how casually he enters the scene, this time as a traveler with a flight to catch. He just sort of huffs up alongside, again 'hiding' himself as he later does on the beach, to let this play out. He asks what they're so upset about—can you believe it?! Cleopas can't. How is it possible that this stranger could have missed the things rocking Jerusalem the past few days? 'What things?' Jesus inquires. Ummm...if anyone knows 'what things,' it is Jesus. These are his 'things' for heaven's sake, his most important things ever. He feigns ignorance?!"*
- The story continues as Jesus allows these disciples to explain in their own words what happened with Jesus of Nazareth—this man who was a mighty prophet, whom they thought was the great Messiah to bring restoration to God's people—how he died, and how bizarrely that morning several women went to the tomb and found it empty.
- Eldredge continues: *"Just a few hours ago [Jesus] walked out of the grave with the keys to hell swinging on his belt and the redemption of mankind in his pocket...[he must be] about as happy as anyone has ever been in the history of the world. But so far he has appeared only to Mary Magdalene. Isn't the moment crying out for him to reveal himself to these shell-shocked followers: 'Look—it's me! I'm alive! Everything is going to be okay! Rejoice! Tell the world!' He doesn't. He carries on with the disguise, apparently for some time, holding forth on highlights from the Old Testament as the three tramp along. Then comes this unbelievable moment [in verse 28]...He acted as if he were going further?! 'Well, nice talking to you chaps. So sorry for your loss. Hope things turn out. But I've got to get going.' What in the world? Christ takes up the role of a thespian, pretending to have to move on, so that they must beg him to stay?! Oh, all right. If you insist. 'When he was at the table with them, he took bread gave thanks, broke it, and began to give it to them. Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him, and he disappeared from their sight,' (vv. 31-32). Poof. See ya. What do you make of this story? Jesus' behavior is either (a) bizarre; (b) meant to drive home some obscure spiritual lesson; or (c) playful. Given that this is the God of a playful creation on his resurrection morn, he who has been so playful with his followers in their years together, whom we see playing the inside joke on his closest friends a week from now [at the Sea of Galilee], I'm putting my money on playful. How have we missed this? Ask yourself, Is this the Jesus of my friends? Of my church? Is this the Jesus we pray to? Is this what I look to experience from Jesus?"* (*Beautiful Outlaw*, © 2011 FaithWords Publishing).
- End quote! What an amazing story to chew on.

- **Why does it Matter?**

- But why does it matter if Jesus is playful? What does it mean for us that a part of God's personality is joyful, exuberant playfulness?
- There is something about seeing the carefree abandon of playfulness of in the lives of young children and elderly adults that gives us a redemptive window into what humans were meant to be.
 - I recently heard about the story of man named Louie Zamporini, whose epic journey was chronicled in the book and movie *Unbroken*.
 - Louie lived a remarkable life: growing up as an Italian-American in Los Angeles getting into trouble, he became a runner and eventually qualified for the 1936 Olympics. Later, seeing combat in the Pacific front of World War II, Louie's plane crashed. Against all odds, he survived 47 days on raft in the Pacific Ocean, only to be picked up by the Japanese as a prisoner of war, where he was tortured for years in a POW camp.
 - When Louie was finally set free, he found that the prison of his shattered heart and mind had become worse than the conditions of his imprisonment. But in his later years, he came to know the redeeming work of Jesus in a real and transformative way.
 - In the book about his life, the author includes a photograph of the elderly Zamporini, taking up *skateboarding* at 81 years old. Morgan Snyder reflected, "The joy on his face is piercing. In spite of all the pain, the loss, the terror, Louie has found a life in the heart of God so deep, he's able not only to live, but to *play*," (*Becoming a King*, © 2020 Thomas Nelson Press).

- Researcher Brene Brown spent a decade interviewing thousands of people and commented, “*I learned how things that I take for granted like rest and play are as vital to our health as nutrition and exercise.*”
- James Bryan Smith teaches that, “*Play is a spiritual exercise that can teach us about living in the kingdom of God...Play is an act of self-abandonment: we stop taking ourselves so seriously and simply enjoy life...Because our heavenly Father watches over us, we are free to let go and play. When we play, we are training our bodies and souls to live with genuine excitement. That is what the kingdom of God is all about,*” (*The Good and Beautiful Life*, © 2009 InterVarsity Press).
- Just this week, I was working in my home office a bit (which is actually an Ikea chair crammed in the corner of our bedroom, but I digress). I was feverishly typing away on my laptop in the middle of a long afternoon, when suddenly my three oldest kids (Julia, Edison, and Gideon) exploded through the door in a wild, toddler frenzy of laughter and chaos and dancing. And the best part was that Julia, in her sisterly kindness, had taken the liberty of clothing all three of them in her flashy princess dresses.
 - So, here they were, two little boys and their sister, all wearing these ridiculous dresses, swirling around the room with the fury of a tornado, prancing about and jumping on the bed and shrieking with laughter like a couple of crazy wood sprites. (If you’ve had a multiple toddlers in your home before then you know what I’m describing.) It was utter chaos and utterly hilarious! And in the mundaneness of that afternoon, it rescued my soul.
 - I was annoyed for a split second, but then I just closed the laptop and burst out laughing, soaking in all wild life they brought to that moment. Emily shouted her apologies for the interruption from down the hall, but I yelled back, “It’s ok. I think The Trinity just showed up in our bedroom.” I was half joking, but also serious: God showed up. As I watched those three goofballs harmoniously overflowing with unbridled laughter and delight, I felt like I was witnessing another visible reminder of the Godhead that creation often brings us.
 - Playfulness can be one of the redemptive ways God interrupts our tediousness and strife to remind us of his infinite, unceasing Joy.
- We can take ourselves so seriously. We can get so burdened, so calloused, so weathered and weary from the battles of this life. But the children of God know how to fight the good fight *and* how to celebrate, how to be soldiers *and* poets, how to be warriors *and* worshipers.
 - Yes, “there is a time and a season for every activity under heaven,” (Ecclesiastes). But in the middle of this awful, crazy time, would you allow yourself to let your guard down for Jesus? Would you allow yourself to be disarmed by the playfulness of God—and, when the time is right, to go and play along with him? Would you be able to recognize it if he interrupted your life with the invitation to stop and play?
 - A key part of our journey of redemption in Jesus Christ is becoming the holy, whole-hearted people God created us to be. And part of being the holy, whole-hearted people is knowing how and when, in this world of darkness and strife, to engage in the serious business of Joy and Play. Maybe what we need right now is to ask God what that would look like for us in this week and this hour.
- Now, before you start thinking that this series is going to be just a fluffy, watering-down of Jesus, I hope you’ll join us next week for Drive-In Church or streaming online, because we’re going to look in another direction and consider the *fierce intention* of Jesus. Don’t miss it!
 - May we discover more and more together the fullness of Christ—this Beautiful Outlaw—because he is the secret to the life we long for. Amen.