

Message Notes July 19th, 2020

Beautiful Outlaw: Encountering the True Personality of Jesus

Week 6: The Disruptive Honesty of Jesus (Luke 11:37-41, 52-54; Luke 10:38-42; Matt. 7:21-23)

• Would You Rather

- Have you ever played “Would you rather?” You know, the game where you get two hypothetical options, usually they’re pretty crazy—and you have to decide which would be better, or less awful, depending on the scenario. Here are a few examples:
 - *“Would you rather go into the past and meet your ancestors or go into the future and meet your great-great grandchildren? Would you rather have more time or more money? Would you rather eat a meal of cow tongue or octopus? Would you rather be stuck on an island all alone or with someone who talks incessantly?”* (How many of you feel like that last one describes your home during quarantine?!)
- So, here is a simple “Would you Rather” for you to consider today:
 - *Would you rather have a friend who always made you feel good or who was honest with you, even when it hurt?*
 - Be thoughtful about how you answer that question. Most of us know intuitively which of those is better, which of those we *should* want. But if we’re honest with ourselves, most of the time, what we *really* want is just someone who will make us feel good.
 - The book of Proverbs says, “The kisses of an enemy may be profuse, but faithful are the wounds of a friend,” (27:6) and, “Giving an honest answer is a sign of true friendship,” (24:26).
- Do you allow the people who love you most to be honest with you, even when it’s not what you want to hear?
 - When it comes to making decisions, I sometimes get tunnel vision on a single topic, even when the surrounding details aren’t adding up. I love that my wife, Emily, has the ability to sometimes see the bigger picture of what’s happening around me... *and* the courage to tell me when I’m about to make a bad decision—and I also hate it when she does it! Do you know what I mean?
 - So, which would you rather have: a friend who always makes you feel good about yourself, or a friend who is honest with you, even when it hurts?
- As we explore the personality of Jesus, the Beautiful Outlaw, in all his fullness, here is one of the really wonderful and terrible things about Jesus that you will be confronted with as you get to know him: **Jesus loves us enough to tell us what we don’t want to hear.**
 - That’s worth repeating: Jesus loves us enough to tell us what we don’t want to hear.

• Disruptive Honesty

- John Eldredge calls this trait, the “disruptive honesty” of Jesus. When you think about all the different things Jesus said, I think this is a pretty good description: *disruptive honesty*.
- Eldredge writes: *“Proof that you have encountered a distinct personality in Jesus is his ability in one tender moment to say the kindest thing and the most startling words in the next. What do you make of someone who can lovingly whisper, ‘Then neither do I condemn you,’ then shout [in another circumstance] ‘Snakes! Reptiles! Sons of hell!’ Now keep in mind, there is a world of difference between being offensive and saying something that offends. It is a matter of location—where in fact does the offense lie? The man who makes a racial slur betrays something ugly in him. The friend who says you’ve had too much to drink spares you something ugly in you. A foghorn is offensive at a dinner party; it is the sweetest sound in the world for a ship lost in a storm. Jesus’ words are not offensive. It is something in us that is offended.”* (*Beautiful Outlaw*, © 2011 FaithWords Publishing)
- Just think about all the different ways Jesus interacted with different people, in different situations.
- And now be reminded of this: as Eldredge writes again, *“...whenever you are watching Jesus, you are watching love. You can always hold that up as you encounter [the more] startling passages...”*

'I am at this very moment watching love in action.'" (*Beautiful Outlaw*, © 2011 FaithWords Publishing)

- But, as you look at the stories we read today, you might be thinking, "How is this *love*? This doesn't even seem polite!" The truth is, we often confuse being *good* with being *nice*. And it's not always the same thing. Real Love can be the sweetest, most comforting thing, and it can also be the hardest, most disruptive thing.
- Look at these two stories of Jesus attending a meal with two different groups of people and consider the differences.
 - First, there is **Luke 11**. Question: how do you act when you're around "important people"? Personally, I get nervous. The *last thing* I want to do is offend someone or make myself look stupid. So, I usually say less, or choose my words very carefully.
 - Jesus is invited to the home of a Pharisee. It's a gathering of important, influential religious leaders: people who have a lot of clout and pull in the community. While everyone files in and does the ceremonial washing, a rule followed rigorously by the Pharisees to show their adherence to the Law, Jesus bypasses the ritual and goes right on in to take his place at the meal.
 - He knows the rule, he knows he's being watched, and he skips it anyway. His host is shocked, and Jesus takes the opportunity to bring some harsh instruction, even confrontation: "*Now then, you Pharisees clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside you are full of greed and wickedness. You foolish people! Did not the one who made the outside make the inside also?*" He goes on to give an absolute tirade of, "*Woe to you Pharisees...Woe to you experts in the law...you yourselves have not entered, and you have hindered those who are entering.*"
 - I can't imagine doing this: what kind of boldness, security, and truthfulness would it take?
 - Then there is the slightly softer story of the meal at **Martha and Mary's** home. Once again, he is the guest.
 - This time, he gets drawn into the middle of a family dispute: Martha is trying to do her part to serve Jesus, fulfilling the traditional role of a woman at the time of hosting for a large group of Jesus and his followers, while he instructed his students in the living area. Mary, instead of doing her expected part by helping with this major endeavor, is acting more like one of the disciples, sitting in the dust of the master's feet and taking in every word.
 - Martha is furious at her sister's irresponsibility and naturally she wants Jesus to take her side. What is he going to do? What do *you* do when you're a guest in someone else's home and you find yourself in the middle of a family argument? Well, Jesus *does* take Martha's side—but not in the way she's asking; he takes her side by helping her to see what's *inside* (*Beautiful Outlaw*): "*Martha, Martha,*" the Lord answered, "*you are worried and upset over many things, but few things are needed—or indeed only one. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken from her.*" (Luke 10:41-42)
- Look at Jesus' willingness to be painfully honest, truthful, and provocative in these different situations. One seems far harsher, the other softer, but it's the same disruptive honesty from a man who, perhaps better than anyone else, knew how to "shoot straight."
- Here's John Eldredge again: "*[Jesus] is on a mission to rescue a people who are so utterly deceived most of them don't even want to be rescued. His honesty and severity are measured out precisely, according to the amount of delusion and self-deception encasing his listener. When a soul is encrusted with pride, bigotry, self-righteousness, and intellectual-elitism—as was his [Pharisee] dinner host—then that shell does need to be struck hard at times in order to cause a crack that might allow some light in. Jesus strikes with the precision of Michelangelo...Jesus' tone seems very different here [with Martha]...This is a softer blow; that is because he is dealing with a softer heart. You get the sense that Martha—though snarky at the moment—would be immediately softened by the truthfulness of Jesus' words.*"
- **The Stumbling Rock**
 - As you know if you've read the Gospels, Jesus said and did many other things that would cause offense in his day, and in ours. Take our final reading in Matt. 7...

“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name and in your name drive out demons and in your name perform many miracles?’ Then I will tell them plainly, ‘I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!’” (Matt. 7:21-23)

- Jesus stands in front of a crowd of avid listeners—he could be standing here with us today—and says: *“Listen, some of you are so confident that you’re already in because you think that outwardly you say and do all the right things—but not everyone here is going to make it to heaven just because you give me ‘lip service.’”*
- I hosted a youth rally once with a speaker I really respect. And during his message, he looked around the room of about 100 teenagers and said bluntly, “not everyone here is going to heaven.” You could hear a pin drop and could feel the weight in the room. It didn’t come from a spirit of condemnation; it was an invitation. It was a plea to recognize and respond to truth.
- *Jesus loves us enough to tell us what we don’t want to hear.* He loves us enough to tell us he is the way, the truth, and the life and no one comes to the Father except through the Son. He loves us enough to tell us that a day is coming when everything hidden will be laid bare, everything wrong will be made right, and some are headed towards a future of everlasting life and joy, but others are on a course towards eternal despair and destruction. He loves us enough to tell us there is a virus that infects every person, and there is just one cure that is totally effective.
- And when Jesus says things like this that go against the grain of our culture or our feelings or our comfort—
we can choose to discount him, to disbelieve him, to be offended by him, to exercise selective hearing—or we can fall at his feet in surrender.
- Think about it: when you see the Cross, can you honestly believe that his heart towards you is anything less than *love*—divine, unrelenting *love*? His heart is that *none* would be lost. And so he warns us of what is real. Why would we not trust him when he says things like, *“I am the only way...you can’t get to heaven just by lip service, you’ve got to give me your whole life.”*
- Maybe, after all, we do just want a friend who makes us feel good and a Bible that conforms to our pre-established opinions.
- In reflecting on the challenging doctrine of judgement, C.S. Lewis wrote: *“There is no doctrine which I would more willingly remove from Christianity than the doctrine of hell, if it lay in my power. But it has the support of Scripture and, especially, of our Lord’s own words...In the long run the answer to all those who object to [it], is itself a question: What are you asking God to do? To wipe out their past sins, and at all costs, to give them a fresh start, smoothing every difficulty and offering every miraculous help? But He has done so, on Calvary. To forgive them? They will not be forgiven. To leave them alone? Alas, I am afraid that is what He does.”* (*The Problem of Pain*)
- The offense isn’t in God; it’s in us. The problem isn’t with Jesus; it’s with us. There are parts about the Bible I don’t understand, there are parts of the Bible I don’t *like*. That doesn’t mean *I’m* right and it’s wrong. But from everything we can see in Scripture, while the depths of our brokenness and rebellion are greater than we can comprehend, the depths of God’s *mercy* are greater than we can imagine. We are given the choice of whether we will lay down our rebellion and go with God, or not.
- The medicine is rough going down, often bitter to the taste, but then it heals us.
- Let me finish with some words from John Eldredge one more time; I think this is important perspective for today: *“The spirit of our day is a soft acceptance of everything—except deep conviction in anything... This is where Jesus will suddenly confront the world as a great rock confronts the river flowing ever downhill. He is immovable. The cry used to be for ‘tolerance,’ by which we meant, ‘We have very strong differences, but we will not let those be the cause of hatred or violence between us.’ Now it is something else, where all convictions are softened to second or third place while we all agree to enjoy the world as much as we can. But truth is not like a conviction.*

Conviction might be a matter of personal opinion, but truth is like a great mountain, solid and immovable whether we like or even acknowledge it. Christianity is not a set of convictions—it is a truth. The most offensive thing imaginable. Jesus is a rock alright. A rock is offensive in your shoe, because it is an inconvenience. If we said, “Away with all rocks!” we would wish the planet out from right under our feet. But a rock is also the only refuge from the raging seas. The shipwrecked soul doesn’t curse the rock because it is immovable; he clings to it, weeping for gratitude.” (Beautiful Outlaw, © 2011 FaithWords Publishing)

- So, would you rather have the real Jesus, or something of your own making? Would you rather have a God who is honest, faithful, and true, or a God who leaves you alone?
- Let’s pray:

God, we confess that your ways are higher than our ways. We don’t always understand you. Sometimes, we are downright disturbed and disrupted by the Rock that is You. We choose, this day, to surrender all that we are to all of you, Jesus. We choose to let you and your Word be the highest authority in our lives, that we may walk into the life that is truly life. We confess that we fall short, and we need your saving love. As we place our trust in you, would you give us humility, give us wisdom, give us understanding, give us insight, give us courage, give us boldness, give us love. Give us the likeness of Christ—who knew how to be playful, humble, fierce, bold, honest, and compassionate, and meet people where they are at. Show us who you really are, and teach us to be who you created us to be, in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, amen.