

Message Notes August 30th, 2020

Beautiful Outlaw: Encountering the True Personality of Jesus

Week 11: The Presence of Jesus (Luke 7:36-50; Matt. 22:34-40; John 15:1-5; Rev. 3:20)

• You were Meant to Have Jesus

- So, we're finally on the *last* message of our "Beautiful Outlaw" series and we've come a long way. To finish things out, I thought it would be interesting to sing a special song for you.
 - This is a song about the simplicity of loving Jesus that has touched my heart ever since I was in fifth grade and I bought my first CD, "King of fools," by the band, Delirious. When I think of this series and what it's all about, I think of this song:
 - *"What a friend I've found / Closer than a brother / I have felt your touch / More intimate than lovers / Jesus, Jesus, Jesus, friend forever / What a hope I've found / More faithful than a mother / It would break my heart / to ever lose each other / Jesus, Jesus, Jesus, friend forever."* (Delirious, "Friend Forever," © 1997, Furious? Records)
- We've covered a lot this summer. Let's just review all the characteristics we talked about as we tried to experience the true character of Jesus: we compared the dynamic personality Jesus to the poison of false religion, we talked about the playfulness of Jesus, the fierce intention of Jesus, we talked about his humanness, his extravagant generosity, his disruptive honesty, his scandalous freedom, his cunning, his humility, and his trueness. And, as today we wrap up the whole journey, we're basically asking: *what do we do with all of this?*
- Here's what John Eldredge says to bring this journey full-circle: *"All of this is merely [entertainment] unless it opens the door for us to experience Jesus...Jesus is our life. We need Jesus like we need oxygen. Like we need water. Like the branch needs the vine. Jesus is not merely a figure for devotions. He is the missing essence of your existence...What if you could have Jesus the way Peter and John had him? The way Mary and Lazarus did? I said at the outset of this book that to have Jesus, really have him, is to have the greatest treasure in all worlds...Now for the best news you will ever receive...You get to...You were meant to have Jesus...You are meant to share life with him—not just a glimpse now and then at church, not just a rare sighting...The purpose of his life, death, and resurrection was to ransom you from your sin, deliver you from the clutches of evil, restore you to God—so that his personality and his life could heal and fill...your life. This is the reason he came...Sadly, for too many people, the Christ they know is too religious to love, too distant to experience, and too rigid to be a source of life...But hear this—Jesus hasn't changed one bit...this is who he is. God is better than we thought. Much better than we feared. Better even than we dared to believe."* (Beautiful Outlaw, © 2011 FaithWords Publishing)
- Let me ask you a question: *what is the purpose of your life?* How, in your heart of hearts, would you answer that question at this moment? For Christians, although you could say it in a lot of different ways, *there is a right way and a wrong way to answer this question!*
 - The purpose of your life is to *know* the one True God, who is revealed in Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God, the Word made flesh. The purpose of your life is letting *his life* fill yours, as the vine gives life to the branches. If you're a Christian, and in your heart, you answer this question in another way than this—another way than Jesus—*then it's simply time to do a check-up and recalibrate.* If you're not yet a Christian, but you've been listening to these talks about Jesus, then maybe it's time to reckon with these claims: *what will you do with Jesus?*
- The purpose of your life boils down to simply *loving God* and *loving others*. This is the Great Commandment of Matthew 22 that Jesus says basically summarizes the teachings of the whole Bible! *Love God, love people.*
 - And the way to become a person who lives with the single-minded purpose of *loving God and others* is to love Jesus and share life with him and let his life fill your life.
 - The way to become this kind of person is to *abide in him* as he *abides in you*, as Jesus taught in John 15. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit apart from being connected to the vine, so your life will not bear this fruit of Godly love unless you are *connected* to Jesus.
- And the purpose of the Church, simply, is to help people make this connection and maintain this connection. Jesus left us with the mission of making disciples of all kinds of people, in all kinds of places. So, as a church what we're meant to do is just draw people into the life of Christ.

- We're here to *train* disciples in the Way of Jesus, to become people of self-giving love who can't help but transform the world around them. Our goal is not just to grow church attendance—to attract people from one church to another with the next greatest thing. No, we're here to nurture the growth of people living Jesus' way who are used by God to bring *new people* into the Kingdom, spreading holiness through the community like yeast in a batch of dough.
- That's why our vision as a church is "Thriving in Christ." That's who we're meant to be, that's what we're meant to do, that's *why* we've been studying all summer about *what Jesus is really like*. Because, how are we supposed to follow him if we don't know him?
- Do you want to live this kind of life? Do you want to know Jesus in this way? Here's the really amazing thing: *everyone is invited. No one needs to be left out. The invitation stands for us all. No matter who you are or how much you've failed or how much you've been hurt. As long as you're living, as long as you're breathing, you have a choice: "Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me."* (Rev. 3:20)
 - Not everyone will accept, not everyone will stick around, but *everyone* is invited. And that means that some pretty unexpected people came to follow Jesus, and still do. Take this story from Luke 7 as a beautiful example.
- **A Harlot Crashes the Party**
 - Jesus had been invited to an important dinner party: he was the famous "guest speaker" visiting the town, and the elite leaders of that community wanted to invite him for dinner to show hospitality to this potential prophet. It was a common and honorable practice to do for prominent guest teachers visiting a synagogue. It sounds like it was a fancy banquet, the kind where everyone was reclining on a couch: Jesus would have probably been leaning on his left arm, eating from the table with his right hand, with his feet stretched away from the table. The expectation was that there would be some special teaching and discussion the Rabbi at the meal.
 - Sometimes, outsiders could get into parties like this to watch from the sidelines and listen in on the discussion, it was sort of a spectator event. Somehow, a "woman of ill-repute," got in; "a woman who lived a sinful life." The implication in this context most likely means a prostitute or at least a "morally loose" woman. Think of the last person you would expect to see in church, think of the person people avoid eye-contact with and try to walk past at the gas station, think of the person who makes a living doing things under the cover of darkness that we're uncomfortable even talking about. She was known to be an immoral person, she was labeled, she was unclean, she was unwelcome in a place like this.
 - But it seems that she had seen Jesus speak. And this woman, of all people, *saw Jesus* for who he was. She saw a goodness in him that could only be God; she saw how—impossible as it might have seemed to a person like her—the life of this man extended the love of God to *even people like her*. Something she had *never seen* from the merely "religious people." Somehow, through the life of this miracle worker from heaven, the Kingdom of God was open wide to her. And her heart was *broken* wide open by his incredible goodness. Jesus saw into her heart and she *saw* Jesus, and she heard his invitation to life.
 - When she found out that Jesus would be here, she was completely overcome, she lost her mind, she abandoned all propriety—at this point, in this town, what did it matter what people thought of her anyway? All that mattered was that Jesus was here and Jesus said she was welcome in the house of God.
 - She got what might have been her most precious possession, an alabaster jar of perfume, brought it to the banquet, and stood there behind Jesus, at his feet, *weeping, weeping* for joy and love, broken by his perfect goodness and generosity. Broken by the prospect that his grace extended to *her*. She stood there *weeping*. She just went *nuts* over this shepherd of lost sheep.
 - She washed his feet *with her tears* and dried them *with her hair*. You know, in this culture, for an adult woman it was expected to cover her hair in public—once a woman married, only her husband and family saw her hair uncovered. Just to be in public with her hair exposed was a sign of immorality. It didn't matter.

- Then she anointed his feet with perfume, its fragrance filling the room.
- Obviously, everyone was dumfounded and disgusted—they were locals and they knew who *she* was. “*What a disgrace,*” right?
 - Here’s the best part: Jesus *accepts* her gift. He accepts her indecent display of gratitude. He doesn’t stop her, he doesn’t say, “Oh, wow, umm, maybe we should just talk...” Instead of scolding her for the lack of propriety or confronting her with sin, he rebukes his *dinner host*.
 - “Two people owed money to a certain moneylender.” (Let’s say one owed \$50,000. and the other \$5.) “Neither of them had the money to pay him back, so he forgave the debts of both. Now which of them will love him more?” Obviously, the one who owed more. “Simon...Do you see this woman? I came into your house. You did not give me water for my feet, but she wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. You did not give me a kiss, but this woman, from the time I entered, has not stopped kissing my feet. You did not put oil on my head, but she has poured perfume on my feet. Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven—as her great love has shown. But whoever has been forgiven little, loves little.” (Luke 7)
- Honestly, between these two characters, the sinful woman, and Simon the Pharisee (the dinner host), I probably have a lot more in common with the Pharisee than I do with the woman.
 - *But I want to know Jesus like she did. I want to know Jesus like that, to love Jesus like that!*
- **Do you want to Know Him?**
 - *Do you know Jesus in this way?*
 - Remember, everyone is invited, even if not everyone will accept. Now is the time to choose, now is the time to accept the grace of God. Will you choose Jesus today? He’s already chosen you, but he loves you too much to force you to choose him. Will you choose Jesus, again, or perhaps for the first time, today?
 - Have you taken the time yet to reckon with the fact that you won’t get to choose *forever*? Someday, your life is going to end, or Jesus is going to return. And by that time, most likely, the choice has already been made. At least, I wouldn’t want to take the chance at that point out.
 - C. S. Lewis said something pretty profound about that time: “*When the author walks on to the stage the play is over. God is going to invade, alright: but what is the good of saying you are on His side then, when you see the whole natural universe melting away like a dream and something else—something it never entered your head to conceive—comes crashing in; something so beautiful to some of us and so terrible to others that none of us will have any choice left? For this time it will be God without disguise; something so overwhelming that it will strike either irresistible love or irresistible horror into every creature. It will be too late then to choose your side. There is no use in saying you choose to lie down when it has become impossible to stand up. That will not be the time for choosing: it will be the time when we discover which side we really have chosen, whether we realized it before or not. Now, today, this moment, is our chance to choose the right side. God is holding back to give us that chance. It will not last forever. We must take it or leave it.*” (Mere Christianity)
 - Some of us have been wishy washy about this our whole life. Something real drew us in, but it’s never really clicked. Some of us came in on fire, but ever so gradually we’ve been fading, and we need a renewal. Some of us, maybe, haven’t even opened the door yet. For everyone, no matter what, no matter who, the invitation stands: Will you choose Jesus? Will you trust Jesus? Will you love Jesus? Will you surrender to Jesus? Will you follow Jesus? Will you let his life fill your life? Will you let Jesus *love you*?
 - Today is the day, now is the time, to choose.
 - We began “Beautiful Outlaw” with this simple prayer. So, let’s end with this simple prayer: “*Jesus, I ask you for the real you. Show me who you are...*” Amen.