

CHRISTLIKENESS: AN INCLUSIVE SPIRIT

2 Corinthians 3:17-18

Video Clip – Judging People (Sermonspice.com)

9 As Jesus went on from there, he saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax collector's booth. "Follow me," he told him, and Matthew got up and followed him. 10 While Jesus was having dinner at Matthew's house, many tax collectors and "sinners" came and ate with him and his disciples. 11 When the Pharisees saw this, they asked his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and 'sinners'?" 12 On hearing this, Jesus said, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. 13 But go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.' For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners."

Matthew 9:9-13 (NIV)

*In *The Ragamuffin Gospel*, author Brennan Manning writes: Here is revelation bright as the evening star: Jesus comes for sinners, for those as outcast as tax collectors and for those caught up in squalid choices and failed dreams. He comes for corporate executives, street people, superstars, farmers, hookers, addicts, IRS agents, and AIDS victims. Jesus not only talks with these people but dines with them – fully aware that His table fellowship with sinners will raise the eyebrows of religious bureaucrats who hold up the robes and insignia of their authority to justify their condemnation of the truth and their rejection of the gospel of grace."*

In the Gospels we learn that Jesus had an inclusive spirit compelled by transformational love.

Zacchaeus

1 Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through.
2 A man was there by the name of Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was wealthy.
3 He wanted to see who Jesus was, but being a short man he could not, because of the crowd.
4 So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore-fig tree to see him, since Jesus was coming that way.
5 When Jesus reached the spot, he looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today."
6 So he came down at once and welcomed him gladly.
7 All the people saw this and began to mutter, "He has gone to be the guest of a 'sinner.'"
8 But Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, "Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount."
9 Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham.
10 For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost." Luke 19:1-10 (NIV)

This passage says Jesus was passing through Jericho when he noticed Zacchaeus sitting or standing in a tree.

Evidently, the word had spread that Jesus was coming through town and Zacchaeus arrived a little late for a front row view. He wanted to see who Jesus was – what did this man who had performed such miracles look like?

You have to wonder what motivated a wealthy man to climb up in a tree.

Something about Zacchaeus caught the attention of Jesus and he said, “Come down, I want to go home with you.”

Of course everyone in town knew this robber and reprobate and asked why would a holy man choose to spend time with such a sinner?

Because Jesus was compelled by an inclusive spirit of transformational love and grace.

**9 Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham.
10 For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost."**

Jesus was teaching in the temple courts when the teachers of the law and the Pharisees brought in a woman caught in adultery.

They put her on public display, making her stand before everyone in the temple courts.

They made their charge against her: "Teacher, this woman was caught in the act of adultery. In the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?"

Of course, they were trying to trap Jesus and using this woman as bait.

Jesus bent down and started writing on the ground with his finger. They kept after Jesus, adding to the humiliation of the woman. I can only imagine that the commotion added to the frenzy of the crowd.

Jesus just kept his head down, writing with his finger. They kept on questioning him until he straightened up and said, v7 **"If any one of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her."**

With that he went back to writing on the ground. They began to leave, the older ones first, followed by the younger ones until no one was left but Jesus and the woman.

10 Jesus straightened up and asked her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?"
11 "No one, sir," she said. "Then neither do I condemn you," Jesus declared. "Go now and leave your life of sin." John 8:1-11 (NIV)

Jesus clearly understood the charge that was brought against the woman, and he knew the penalty of the law.

He did not excuse her sin – but he reached out to her with transformational love and grace.

Jesus declared. "Go now and leave your life of sin."

I have asked, “What would have happened to that woman if her fate had been left in the hands of the religious leaders?”

Jesus was having dinner in the home of a Pharisee when a woman of sinful reputation learned that Jesus was there.

She made her way to the house and moved through the crowd until she reached the place where Jesus was reclining.

She was overcome with emotion – her life of sin had met with hope. Her tears ran off her chin onto the feet of Jesus. She knelt and began to wipe his wet feet with her hair. She could not contain herself as she began to kiss his feet and to pour perfume on them.

The religious people were appalled. Who let her in? What is she doing? Doesn't Jesus know what kind of woman this is? Why doesn't he stop her? Someone should stop this nonsense before it gets out of hand.

44 Then he turned toward the woman and said to Simon,

"Do you see this woman? I came into your house. You did not give me any water for my feet, but she wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair.

45 You did not give me a kiss, but this woman, from the time I entered, has not stopped kissing my feet.

46 You did not put oil on my head, but she has poured perfume on my feet.

47 Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven--for she loved much. But he who has been forgiven little loves little."

48 Then Jesus said to her, "Your sins are forgiven."

49 The other guests began to say among themselves, "Who is this who even forgives sins?"

50 Jesus said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace." Luke 7:36-50 (NIV)

This woman found faith, forgiveness, and a future of peace through Jesus. While others ridiculed and rejected her she found in Jesus transformational love and grace.

Philip Yancey writes, *The Jesus I Never Knew*; "Jesus was the friend of sinners. They liked being around him and longed for his company. Meanwhile, legalists found him shocking, even revolting. What was Jesus' secret that we have lost?"

Perhaps we have been guilty of boxing God in with our own preconceived ideas of who He is.

- What do we believe about God?

- Do we believe that God loves unconditionally?
- Do we believe that God loves all persons? That He loves the loveless, the unloving and the unlovable?

Brennan Manning, *Lion and the Lamb – The Relentless Tenderness of Jesus*: “*Now: unlike ourselves, the Father of Jesus loves men and women, not for what he finds in them, but for what lies within Himself. It is not because men and women are good that He loves them, nor only good men and women that He loves. It is because He is so unutterably good that He loves all persons.*” pg 20

The Apostle John cries out: **God is love. 1 John 4:16 (NIV)**
"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. John 3:16 (NIV)

“What this says simply is that the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ is gracious. His love is gratuitous in a way that defies are imagination.” pg 20

If we believe that God loves conditionally then we not only box God out, but we box the Gospel up by our misguided opinions.

We will limit the scope and hope of the Gospel. We will see people as undesirable and unreachable. We will become legalistic and rigid in our own faith.

My brothers and sisters this is the good news of the Gospel:

“The religious image of a vindictive, mean, and jealous God gives way in Jesus to the God of faith who cherishes people, all people, and has made his abode with them A God who forgives instead of condemning, and liberates instead of punishing.” (Manning: Lion and the Lamb, pg 25)

4 But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, 5 made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions--it is by grace you have been saved. Ephesians 2:4-5 (NIV)

If we believe that God loves conditionally then we box God in, we box the Gospel up, and we also box people out by our prejudices.

I have lived long enough to see the hurt, wounds, and injustice that religious people have done to each other all in the name of God.

The spiritual landscape is littered with people, who have been pushed out, ostracized, and obliterated by the prejudices of religiosity.

11 Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. 12 No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us. 1 John 4:11-12 (NIV)

This summer I heard Dr. Jeren Rowell, District Superintendent of the Kansas City District, give his annual report to the district family. With his permission I am sharing a part of that report to illustrate what I am driving at in this message:

“When we get serious about making disciples in our going, it will inevitably lead us to some “out of the box, not normal, stretch the limits, and maybe even make us blush” kinds of strategies that put us in contact with the very people Jesus seemed to want to hang out with.

One of the most remarkable strategies I’ve ever seen comes through the obedient, radical love of a group of Nazarenes in Gardner, Kansas who decided that God was calling them to find a way to let the people at two local “gentlemen’s clubs” (so called) know that Jesus loves them. I want you to hear this remarkable story, and just so you don’t miss the point, when they talk about going to the clubs, it’s the women of the church who go and reach out to the girls who work there.

Really? Would Jesus really lead his holy people into this kind of engagement with the world? I have here a letter from the owner of one of these clubs. Listen to what he says, "I grew up thinking that religion was all about control of other people and if you didn't fit the mold you were thrown to the other side of the line. Either you're a good person or a bad person. They criticize you if you don't follow their rules even if you didn't know the rules.

From what I know of Jesus I thought he talked to all people and did not judge them but explained what they should be doing and let them figure out what they needed to change."

If you've paid any real attention at all to Jesus' parables you realize that they were not nice little stories to help people understand things better. As one writer said, "If you want to begin to understand these parables you need to ask yourself, 'Why would you kill somebody for telling this story?'" Loved ones, are we willing for the model of Jesus to become more than nice stories we tell on Sunday? Are we willing actually to enact the life of Jesus in the dark corners of our world?

The club owner continues, "Since Erin and the ladies started coming I have had two people ask me what I know about religion and that they were never taught anything about God. So I told both they could call and these people would be glad to help with their questions without judging. Not in a million years would I have thought I would be sending friends to church people to

learn about God. Thanks for giving us a chance to see another side of religion.”

Now, I’m not suggesting that all churches seek this kind of ministry – in fact you should *not* do it unless God directs – and that’s the point. This isn’t about coming up with a good idea. This is about living in obedience to the direction of the Spirit who will teach us how to make disciples in our going.

We’re talking about a level of engagement in the disciple-making mission of our Lord that goes way beyond our gatherings on Sunday and our programs that mostly are about making us happy. We’re talking about a level of engagement with our world that is costly, dangerous, and forces us on our knees in utter dependency upon the Holy Spirit.”

Video Clip – Unspoken Plea (Sermonspice.com)

Christlikeness is an inclusive spirit compelled by transformational love.