

Sunday Sidebar- August 4, 2019

Our Human Condition:

“I don’t really like the poor. They’re not always clean. I stay away from sick people. They smell bad. I don’t understand people whose customs, culture, and ways of thinking are different from mine. They make me feel uncomfortable. I don’t want to go to church with them or socialize with them. People with handicaps also make me feel awkward. Actually, I enjoy being with people who are just like me.”

This is the opening paragraph of chapter 21 in the Disciple 1 Bible study. It captures our human condition when we leave Jesus out of life and make it all about us and our personal preferences. But our personal preference and comfort are not the most important factors in life. Our relationship with Jesus Christ is the most important factor! And if we are in relationship with him, we will follow his lead....and we will learn to care about and serve the least, the last, and the lost....

Jesus Came to Seek and Save the Lost

In the 4th chapter of the Gospel of Luke, we find Jesus quoting a scripture (Isaiah 61.1,2) that functioned pretty much as the pattern for his itinerant ministry:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.

Jesus spent his 3 years of ministry in service to sinners and tax collectors, fishermen and Pharisees, women and laborers, the sick and leprous, children and Samaritans, the “in” group and the outsiders. He threw his weight in with the least, the last, and the lost. And he was compassionate to all who were earnestly seeking a better understanding of, and relationship with, God. When the Pharisees tried to “trap him” or just wanted to criticize his activities (like healing a man on the Sabbath), then Jesus had little time for them. But when a Pharisee named Nicodemus came to Jesus (by night) with some questions about his ministry and methods, Jesus spent time with Nicodemus, because he was really seeking the truth. Jesus sincerely wanted to share the good news of God’s love with all people. But Jesus was not what others expected, and sometimes, people just out and out rejected him, instead of considering that their expectations might be wrong.

But whenever people did open their hearts and minds to Jesus’ message, wherever they humbled themselves enough to receive his grace, healing and reconciliation and new life abounded! Think of the Centurion’s faith and the widow whose son, Jesus raised (Luke 7); all the demon-possessed people whom Jesus restored to health and full function; Jairus’ daughter restored to life and the woman with the flow of blood whom Jesus healed in body, mind, and spirit; all the people Jesus healed from physical ailments like the man with dropsy and the blind

beggar and the lepers....and the list goes on and on and on. Everywhere Jesus went, there were those who rejected his offer of grace, and those who thankfully received it.

And then of course, Jesus died on the cross to save all of us from our sins! As Paul states it in Romans 3.23-25:

...since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God; they are now justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a sacrifice of atonement by his blood, effective through faith.

Still today, some people reject Jesus, and others receive him with gratitude. Into which category do you fall?