Jesus Associates with Sinners and Challenges Traditions

Jesus continues to turn messianic expectations upside-down. Everything that people expected that kingdom of God to look like is turned on it's head by Jesus. A lot of this started last week when we discussed Jesus healing the paralytic. Jesus stirs up controversy by healing the man's spiritual condition even before addressing the man's physical problems. It seems the pharisees were fine with Jesus ability to do great miracles—healing people of their physical problems. I guess they figured the OT was full of accounts of prophets doing the same. A man doing a miraculous healing in the name of God is one thing, but someone claiming to stand in the place of God and claiming to forgive sins in his own name—directly—something only God can do, was quite controversial and new.

In our study today, the controversy continues.

1. In the nineties, a song came out entitled "One of Us." Joan Osborn sang:

What if God was one of us/Just a slob like one of us
Just a stranger on a bus/Trying to make His way home
If God had a face what would it look like/And would you want to see
If seeing meant that you would have to believe
In things like Heaven and in Jesus and the Saints/And all the Prophets
And yeah, yeah God is great/Yeah, yeah God is good/Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah

This song used to annoy me, although I have to admit it's catchy and easily got stuck in my head. What always bothered me, though, was the vague, ironic question that asked: What if God was one of us? Because the truth is that God truly did become one of us, as revealed in Jesus Christ. This central idea is at the heart of the Bible and what inspired the prophets, apostles, and saints to risk their lives for the sake of the message that God took on human form through Christ.

Instead of asking, "What if God was one of us?" we should be asking, "Why would God do this?" Hebrews 2:17 provides the answer: "Therefore He had to be made like His brothers in every respect, so that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people."

In Luke chapters four and five, Jesus reveals Himself as the priestly Messiah, fulfilling our needs in ways we cannot achieve on our own. He faces temptations from Satan and confrontations with demons, yet remains steadfast in His commitment to God's will. He boldly reaches out to touch an unclean leper, maintaining His perfect cleanliness and holiness. Time and again, He heals physical ailments, but when He encounters a paralytic, He looks beyond the visible condition to address a deeper issue—He grants forgiveness for the man's sins. Remarkably, He doesn't wait for the man to ask for forgiveness; instead, He takes the initiative. Today, we will see that Jesus doesn't simply wait for sinners to come to Him; He actively seeks them out, longing to reconcile all sinners to God. This is the essence of what a true priest does. The word "priest" in Latin means bridge-builder. The kingdom of God is all about bridging the

gap so that sinners can be in fellowship with God. How do we do that as part of the "priesthood" of all believers?

2. Read Luke 5:27-32. In what ways does Jesus' calling Levi (Matthew) to be a disciple challenge our understanding of who is worthy of forgiveness and inclusion in the community of believers?

Jesus highlights the importance of grace and the transformative power of forgiveness. How we show God's grace and forgiveness serves as an invitation for others. The gospel is a calling to a new way of life. Consider how this connects with what we call repentance. The Greek word is *metanoia* which means to "be turned from" or "to have a change of mind." It's tantamount to conversion. See our previous discussion in session 10, question 1.

We can make repentance seem so clinical and technical—you've got to confess your sins, see your need for a Savior, strive not to go back to your sinful ways.

But what I love about what Luke tells us in this section is how natural and relational Jesus is in extending God's love and grace into this world—as simple as hanging out at a party with all the wrong sorts of people. Table fellowship in the scriptures is something that is quite profound. God was willing to feed Adam and Eve in the Garden and again and again throughout salvation history.

3. Reflecting on Jesus' analogy in verses 31 and 32, which of the following statements do you believe represents the primary purpose of God's kingdom in Christ?

A. Showing compassion to sinners B. Building a community of holy, godly individuals

Based on your choice, what changes do you think the Church should make to more effectively achieve this goal?

4. Read Luke 5:33. Although this is just one verse, consider how the Pharisees' observation about Jesus' disciples emphasizes what a life of following Jesus should look like. One word: Normal!!! Christians aren't supposed to be weird or holier-than-thou. Just normal. The disciples would eat and "drink." Notice that this is a clear indication that Jesus' disciples consumed alcohol. Although they are not being accused of being drunk or of debauchery. But they are clearly not practicing total abstinence from alcohol as must have been the custom of other religious groups. While abstaining from alcohol might be necessary for people who have struggled with substance abuse, it is not a mark of a holy life.

Fasting was used to prepare for something. But when Jesus is with you, what need is there to fast? When Christians today fast, it should be a time to remember Christ's second coming and what that means for our lives.

5. Read Luke 5:34-39. Humanly speaking, old wine is better than new wine. But contrary to what we might normally expected, the fullness of the kingdom of God is hidden in new wine, a paradox that demonstrates the upside-down nature of the kingdom. How did the table fellowship of Jesus—his hanging out with and having dinner with sinners—demonstrate the new wine of God's kingdom? What

does He mean in verse 39 when He says, “No one after drinking old wine desires new wine, for he says, ‘the old is good’”?

Jesus’ act of dining with sinners illustrates the new wine of God's kingdom by breaking the social and religious barriers that Judaism had created. In that cultural context, table fellowship was significant; it indicated acceptance and kinship connection. By welcoming sinners, Jesus was demonstrating that God's kingdom is inclusive and even connected to sinful people, that God seeks to restore rather than condemn. This was always God’s purpose, even in the OT. But the OT was a shadow of the fullness that was to come in the NT. The OT purity laws were about seeking to restore he relationship to God and his people. The Jews mistakenly interpreted this to mean that ONLY Jews were allowed—good law-abiding, Torah following Jews. They lost sight of wonderful stories like Rahab, Naaman, Jonah and Ninevah, etc, that showed that God wanted even gentiles to be restored into the family of God. Jesus approach contrasts sharply then with the current religious establishment, which often emphasized purity laws over compassion. His interactions revealed that the kingdom of God is about relationship and grace rather than rigid adherence to OT laws.

In verse 39, when Jesus states, "No one after drinking old wine desires new wine, for he says, ‘the old is good’," He is highlighting a natural human tendency to cling to familiar comforts and traditions. The "old wine" symbolizes established religious practices and beliefs, which can feel comfortable and secure. People accustomed to the old ways may resist the new, transformative message of the kingdom because change can be unsettling. Jesus points out that those who have grown accustomed to the old ways might dismiss the newness He offers, even if it holds greater depth, fulfilment and alignment with God’s heart and will.

6 Read Luke 6:1-11. The Pharisees placed an enormous yoke or burden on the people concerning the various laws surrounding the Sabbath—many of which were manmade. As such, the religion of the rank-and-file people became wooden, legalistic and entirely self-centered. There wasn’t much concern for actual acts of kindness and mercy towards others, such as Jesus healing the man with the withered hand.

Reflect on Genesis chapters 1 and 2. What was the significance of the Sabbath, and how does it relate to God’s original design for humanity as outlined in Genesis 1:26-28? How does Jesus statement about “being the Lord of the Sabbath” connect?

The significance of the Sabbath in Genesis chapters 1 and 2 is foundational to understanding God's original design for humanity. In Genesis 2:2-3, God rests on the seventh day after the creation, which not only establishes a day of rest but also sets a divine rhythm of work and rest for human beings. The Sabbath is significant in that it is a time set apart for restoration, reflection, and relationship—with God and with one another.

In Genesis 1:26-28, God creates humanity in His own image and gives them dominion over the earth, instructing them to be fruitful and multiply. This original design implies that human beings are meant to engage in fruitful work and stewardship of creation, but it is equally important that they also take time to rest and connect with the Creator. The Sabbath serves as a reminder of God's creative work and invites humanity to pause, reflect, and recharge. It emphasizes that resting is not merely about ceasing from work but also about nurturing spiritual and relational well-being.

When Jesus states, “I am the Lord of the Sabbath” (Mark 2:28), He asserts His authority over the Sabbath and emphasizes that it should be understood in the context of mercy and human need rather than merely as a set of rules. By healing on the Sabbath, He restores the true meaning of the day, highlighting that it is a time for grace, healing, and love. This perspective shifts the focus back to God’s original intent for humanity—finding rest in Him while actively engaging in love and care for others. Ultimately, the Sabbath is about the relationship between God and humanity, inviting them into a rhythm of life that embodies both work and rest in harmony.

7. Thinking about Jesus' willingness to reach out to unexpected people in unexpected ways, can you share a time when you felt included or invited, perhaps in a situation where you didn't expect it? How can those experiences shape the way we extend grace to others in our lives today?

One way to think about Jesus’ outreach is that it often happened in everyday moments—through simple acts of kindness, genuine conversations, or being present for someone in need. For example, when a church member invited someone new to join a small group or shared a meal with a neighbor, it illustrated that reaching out doesn't have to be complex or grandiose. In contrast, we’ve probably all seen plenty of examples where simple rudeness or indifference cause people to leave the church.

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